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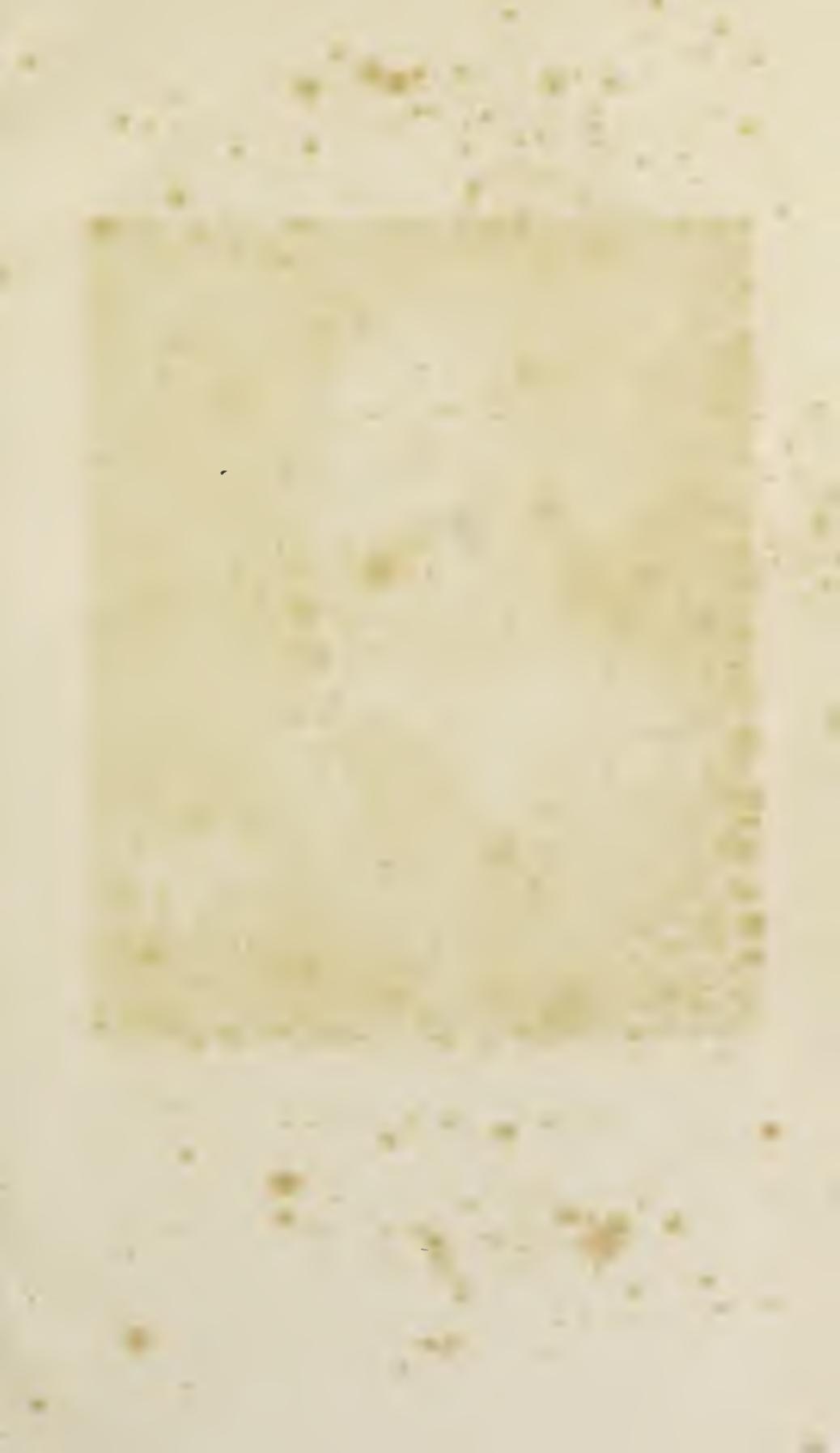






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HIS MAJESTY ERNEST-AUGUSTUS,  
KING OF HANOVER

*Emmett*

LIFE AND TIMES  
OF  
SIR ROBERT PEEL.

BY  
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Melbourne

# SIR ROBERT PEEEL:

## HIS LIFE AND TIMES.

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### CHAPTER I.

#### THE MELBOURNE ADMINISTRATION.

It was a calamity to Lord Melbourne and his colleagues that they were compelled to carry on the government with Sir Robert Peel's parliament. In that parliament they had a very narrow majority, composed chiefly of Irish members elected by the influence of O'Connell, and only holding political existence as the creatures of his will. Hence the unpopularity of the great agitator with the friends of order and tranquillity in England, was reflected back on the ministry, while it was necessary to purchase the continuance of his support by a large share of the public patronage in Ireland. O'Connell was not the man to conceal the power incident to his position ; during the course of the preceding autumn, he had assailed "the base, brutal, and bloody Whigs" with every vituperative epithet which his unrivalled powers of defamatory eloquence could supply ; to explain the cordial support that he now accorded to those same

Whigs, he everywhere proclaimed that the Whigs had come over to him, instead of his going over to them ; and his friends did not scruple to insinuate, that if he was not in name Lord-Lieutenant of Ireland, he was in fact a secret viceroy over the nobleman who ostensibly held that office.

The first duty which devolved on the new ministers was giving effect to the recommendations of the commissioners appointed to inquire into the condition and management of the municipal corporations. The changes made in the elective franchise by the reform bill necessarily required extensive alterations in the local government of boroughs ; the necessity of change was conceded by all parties, and the only dispute was as to the extent to which reform of corporations should be carried. The Conservatives were particularly anxious to preserve the existing privileges of freemen, and also the rights of acquiring freedom by birth, servitude, or marriage. Amendments embodying these principles were proposed in the House of Commons, but rejected ; they were, however, subsequently carried in the Lords, and with some modifications finally adopted. The ministerial bill, for regulating the Irish Church, was less successful ; it passed through the House of Commons with little difficulty, but the Lords rejected all the clauses for the suppression of benefices, and the appropriation of their funds : under these circumstances ministers abandoned the bill ; but a measure relieving the Irish clergy from repaying the advances made under Lord Stanley's act, was hurried through both Houses without opposition.

The Church of Scotland was hardly less of a ministerial difficulty than the Church of Ireland. Application had been made for a parliamentary grant to extend the means of spiritual instruction afforded by that church, which in many places was greatly disproportioned to the amount of the population. Instead of a grant, the Melbourne cabinet

issued a commission to inquire into "the opportunities of religious worship, and the means of religious instruction afforded to the people of Scotland," so as to bring the Dissenting bodies as well as the Establishment within the range of the inquiry. This gave some offence to the adherents of the kirk, and they were equally displeased with the selection of commissioners: resolutions condemnatory of the course pursued by government were carried in the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, and a series of perplexing discussions arose, which tended greatly to weaken the Whig influence north of the Tweed.

Soon after his accession to power, Lord Palmerston gave the Spanish Constitutional Government permission to levy an auxiliary legion in Britain, the command of which was given to Colonel de Lacy Evans, one of the representatives for the city of Westminster. The propriety of this measure was very keenly canvassed, within and without the walls of parliament; but the general dislike of Don Carlos, and the disgust created by the atrocities which he sanctioned, were sufficient to quell, if not to overcome, the reluctance with which Englishmen consent that their fellow-countrymen should act as mercenaries for a foreign power. Sir Robert Peel, though strongly urged by some of his party, refused to lend any countenance to the cry attempted to be raised against Colonel Evans and the British auxiliary legion; he evinced a greater leaning to a liberal policy in foreign affairs than any of his colleagues in the late cabinet, and thus conciliated to himself personally, not merely the respect, but much of the confidence of moderate reformers.

Timid and moderate men were further alienated from the Liberal party by the intemperate attacks which were made by the more violent radicals on the House of Lords, in consequence of the mutilation of the Municipal bill, and the loss of the measure for regulating and appropriating the

revenues of the Irish Church. On the rising of parliament, Mr. O'Connell undertook what he called a mission to preach the necessity of a reform of the House of Lords, in the north of England, and among the Presbyterians of Scotland. He received dinners and propounded his doctrines at Manchester, Newcastle, Edinburgh, and Glasgow; but the cause was unfortunate in its missionary. Excepting those who were attracted by curiosity, all the respectable classes of society, even the middle classes, kept aloof from his banquets and exhortations. Nor is this surprising, when we consider the coarse language that he employed, and the violent measures which he recommended.

"We have arrived at a crisis," said he to the assembled crowd at Manchester: "Sir Robert Peel stands on the one side as the advocate of the aristocracy. More shame for him! His father was a respectable operative, and worked at a cotton factory; he made a noble fortune by honourable industry—one of the finest things this country ever produced, and arising out of its great wealth; he realized this with credit and integrity, and making every one happy around him. He was truly an honour to England. Is it not a shame, then, for the son of this man, for the present Sir Robert Peel, to forget the people? He ranges himself on the side of the aristocracy: and what do the Lords want? To fasten their sons and sons-in-law, and cousins and nephews, upon the public purse, and instead of giving them an estate, to give them the public money. That's the thing that has involved England in debt; and Peel stands up for that system; and the people of England, Ireland, and Scotland, have already condemned him once; and condemn him again they will, as sure as ever he puts himself on his trial. He says that we reformers are only for one house of legislature. Now, I am for two. We have one that is honest, and one that is not honest. I want two honest houses. I want not

one white and one blaek ; that goes for nothing ; but we want two whites, and will throw the one blaek out altogether. . . .

“ This is a mission, my friends, that I am upon. I am going round amongst the people of England and of Scotland, to call upon them to act with common sense—to avoid violence ; because, besides strengthening their enemies, that is essentially wrong in itself. But, thank God, information spreads among you. The operative classes are now better informed than the Lords. I have seen letters from five-and-fifty lords, and I would take out of any meelhanies’ institution in the British dominions six men by lot, and there is not one of them who would not write a letter better than any of those Lords.”

Such intemperate violence found few admirers in Manchester, even amongst those who were the most inclined to support the principles of the orator, and some of his friends ventured to remonstrate with him on his using language so unsuited to the taste of a respectable English audience. But O’Connell was not to be restrained, and at Newcastle-on-Tyne, he repeated the same sentiments in still more offensive language.

“ We have come to the crisis—we must either write ourselves down slaves, or you must demand that there shall be no such thing as irresponsible, and therefore abused power. The question is, whether you are to have 170 masters or not—170 irresponsible masters—the people looking for the redress of their grievances, and looking for it in vain. Would you endure that any gang or banditti, I care not by what name you call them, should treat them and you contemptuously ? In one word, I will call them rogues. I incite peace ; I do not want the stones to mutiny ; but I recommend to you perseverance and perpetual agitation, until you obtain the amelioration of your institutions. The

cry will go through England ; each man will look at his neighbour, and say,—Are you for the slavery of England, or for the improvement of her institutions ?—Will you suffer the Peels and the Goulburns to prey upon the freedom of England, to tarnish that which they cannot destroy, and to prey upon that which is too bright and too glorious for animals so obscene ?”

As the missionary advanced north, his inspirations became more raving and unmanageable.

“ We achieved but one good measure,” said he at Edinburgh, “ this last session ; but that was not our fault, for the 170 tyrants of the country prevented us from achieving more. Ancient Athens was degraded for submitting to thirty tyrants ; modern Athens will never allow 170 tyrants to rule over her. I have started on this mission to rouse the public mind to the necessity of reforming the House of Lords, and I have had 50,000 cheering me in Manchester, and 100,000 cheering me in Newcastle ; and I heard one simultaneous cry,—‘ Down with the mad dogs, and up with common sense.’ The same cry has resounded through Auld Reekie. The Calton-hill and Arthur’s seat re-echoed with the sound ; and all Scotland has expressed the same determination to use every legitimate effort to remove the House of Lords. Though the Commons are with us, yet the House of Lords are against us, and they have determined that they will not concede a portion of freedom which they can possibly keep back. Sir Robert Peel,—the greatest humbugger that ever lived, and as full of political and religious cant as any man that ever canted in this canting world—feeling himself quite safe on his own dunghill, says that we want but one Chamber—one House of Radical Reformers. He knew that in saying this he was saying what was not true. We knew too well the advantage of double deliberation, not to support two Houses ; but they must be subject to popular control ; they

must be the servants, not the masters, of the people. The first step we must take is, to be perfectly unanimous among ourselves; let the names of Whig and Radical be for ever buried in the name of Common Reformer. To my certain knowledge, the Whigs of this year are not the Whigs of last. Having now seen the want of popular support, and felt the fangs of the aristocracy, they have come round to us; and we should be blockheads, if we did not go the rest of the way to meet them. They have gone far enough at present; they will go the rest by degrees, if they are not shoved on too fast."

This crusade or mission of Mr. O'Connell was one of the greatest of the many blunders of his political life; it injured the cause, both of himself and the ministry, of whose alliance he boasted, and whose interests, as identified with his own, he pretended to be serving. In general, the Whigs throughout the country had anticipated this result; they held aloof from him during his progress, and were neither to be found among his hospitable entertainers or applauding hearers; but his asseverations, that the Whigs had come over to him, were too strong and too often repeated, not to produce some impression, and so far as his assertions found credence, they were injurious to the ministry. The Whigs felt the consequences of this, in some elections which took place at the close of the session. Many country-gentlemen refused to support a "Whig-radical cabinet," as O'Connell had baptized it, though they declared that they were as attached to Whig principles as ever; this defection caused ministers to lose two supporters when the borough of Devizes and the county of Northampton were vacated. The Whigs found it necessary to disclaim all participation in schemes which had become so obnoxious; and Lord John Russell took the opportunity of a public dinner to announce, that he and his

colleagues were altogether opposed, to what he termed, organic changes in the constitution.

The Irish municipal corporations, and the Irish church, furnished the chief battle-ground for parties in 1837. A more important measure relating to Ireland, was the proposed introduction of Poor Laws into that country; but as it afforded little scope for the exercise of party hostility, it excited far less attention than the other two. These topics were thus noticed in the King's speech:—

"I trust that you will be able to effect a just settlement of the question of tithe in Ireland upon such principles as will tend, at length, to establish harmony and peace in that country.

"You are already in possession of the Report of the Commission appointed to inquire into the state of the Municipal Corporations in Ireland; and I entertain a hope that it will be in your power to apply to any defects and evils which may have been shown to exist in those institutions, a remedy founded upon the same principles as those of the Acts which have already passed for England and Scotland.

"A further Report of the Commission of Inquiry into the condition of the poorer classes of my subjects in Ireland will speedily be laid before you. You will approach this subject with the caution due to its importance and difficulty; and the experience of the salutary effects already produced by the Act for the amendment of the laws relating to the poor in England and Wales may, in many respects, assist your deliberations.

"I rely upon your prudence and wisdom, and upon your determination to maintain, as well as to amend, the laws and institutions of the country; and I commit these questions of domestic policy, to which I have deemed it my duty to direct your attention, into your hands, persuaded that

you will so treat them, as to increase the happiness and prosperity, by promoting the religion and morality, of my people."

In the debate on the Address, the Duke of Wellington was unfortunately induced to resist the application to Ireland of those principles of municipal reform which had been sanctioned during the preceding session for England and Scotland. This was establishing an invidious difference between the several parts of the united empire, which could not fail to give strength to O'Connell and the Irish repealers, and which, in fact, furnished an entirely new stock in trade for their almost exhausted agitation. The Duke of Wellington proposed, that instead of "the same principles as those of the acts which have already passed for England and Scotland," there should be inserted, "the applying such remedies as may obviate just causes of complaint, and ensure the impartial administration of justice." This amendment was carried in the House of Lords with little debate, and with no division. The result in the House of Commons, where a similar amendment was moved by Sir Robert Peel, and eagerly supported by Lord Stanley, who now had completely coalesced with the Conservative leader, had a very different result. O'Connell, in the strongest terms, declared that he and his followers were ready to abandon for ever the cry of Repeal, if he could obtain "justice for Ireland!" There was such obvious equity in the demand, that it enabled him to retrieve his popularity in England, without losing his influence in Ireland. His speech produced a powerful effect in the House, and in the country; the amendment was rejected by a majority of forty-one, and through all the popular districts of England, the cry of, "Justice to Ireland!" became the watchword of the liberal party.

This first step of Sir Robert Peel, as leader of the Con-

servative opposition, raised difficulties and embarrassments around him which have been, ever since, the chief impediments in his public career. It was probably suggested by Lord Stanley, who was too imprudent to take into consideration all the consequences of factious opposition. He hated O'Connell—he nurtured a passionate dislike of the Irish people, for reposing such implicit confidence in the object of his hatred—and he was misled by the belief, that the establishing of the Irish corporations on a popular basis, would give O'Connell the same power over the elections of municipal officers, that he already wielded in the election of members of parliament. But he did not see that the power of a demagogue is greatly restrained so soon as it is once subjected to legal and constitutional forms. O'Connell would probably have filled three-fourths of the municipal offices of Ireland with his creatures; but the debates and discussions of town-councils, however foolish, or however mischievous, would not be near so perilous to the public tranquillity as the tumultuary excitement of aggregate meetings. When O'Connell declared, that “Corporations in Ireland would become *normal schools of agitation*,” he really gave utterance to the strongest recommendation that could be urged in their favour, for it would be a national gain to have Irish agitators trained in a school of any kind, as they would then have a chance of learning some elements of grammar and logic, and some principles of common decency and common sense.

In excuse for the factious conduct pursued by the Conservative opposition, it has been sometimes pleaded, that no reliance could be placed on the promises of Mr. O'Connell. But though it is undeniable, that the great agitator, when addressing ignorant multitudes, not unfrequently hazarded pledges which he did not, and indeed could not redeem, he would never have violated a solemn compact with the British parliament, made in the face of Europe. On all sides it was

conceded that the close corporations of Ireland had become nuisances which required to be abated ; but this was not a sufficient reason for abolishing municipalities altogether ; the partisans of the ascendancy in Ireland, however, finding that they could no longer maintain the exclusive monopoly of the corporations, besought the Conservatives to prevent the transfer of the power to other hands, and, in an evil hour, Peel and Stanley adopted a course fatally calculated to revive religious animosities, and excite national jealousies.

The second reading of the bill for Irish Municipal Reform was moved by the Attorney-General for Ireland, Mr. O'Loghlen, and the case he made out against the old corporations was so strong, that no one ventured to say a word in their defence. It devolved on Sir Robert Peel to explain the course which the opposition had resolved to pursue, and to explain the reasons for refusing any form of municipal government to the Irish. He entered on this difficult and invidious task with unusual zeal, and argued the case with great ability, though not with perfect fairness. Having shown that most of the corporations in Ireland had been established by James I. to secure and promote Protestant interests, he observed that the ministerial measure for throwing these corporations open to all classes amounted in fact to a complete annihilation of the old corporate system in Ireland, and that there would be no more connection between the old and new corporations than there existed between the old and new departmental systems in France. He granted that it would be unwise to maintain the existing corporations in Ireland, but he insisted that their evils would not be remedied by a system of popular election. On the contrary, he believed that in towns having their corporations and corporate justees independent of the control of the crown, in which unfortunately a state of discord already prevailed, arising out of religious differences and animosities, fresh

causes of division and discontent would be consequent on the frequent elections which the bill would render necessary. His peroration was a fine combination of argument and remonstrance, and it was delivered with an earnestness of tone and manner which showed that the orator spoke from thorough conviction.

"If I were contending that there ought to be any distinction—that privileges should be conferred upon one class which were to be withheld from another—I admit that there would be a radical and a fundamental defect in my proposition. Our chief object should be, not to assimilate the system in Ireland with that of England, but to inquire by what system equal privileges and equal laws can be conferred on Ireland. I admit, that whatever may be your theoretical systems, this at least should be your practical object; I admit that, if, by self-election, you practically exclude one class, a great injustice is done, but injustice is equally continued by a system of popular election, if thereby you give a preponderance to another class. If the effect of what you do be the exclusion of Protestants, not as Protestants, but whose exclusion is produced by the conflict of one party with another, then you involve the country in a series of quarrels and divisions, and you inflict upon Ireland the most grievous evils, by giving the administration of justice to the dominant party. Evils, I admit, follow from self-election; but the force of popular control is sometimes equally subject to objection. Now, I would ask honourable members, have they read the evidence given before the commissioners? Do you believe that this bill will tend to assuage existing animosities? Do you believe that it will conduce to the administration of equal laws, to introduce this system of annual elections in one hundred and twenty towns in Ireland,—placing, too, the police in the hands of the dominant party: are they, too, to have the appointment of

the officers by whom the grand and petit jurors are selected? Whichever is the party that prevails, you should not permit it to inflict injustice. Who will rise in this House and say that in determining the elections of town-councils politics shall not be introduced; and if they be permitted to interfere—and men are elected, I would assume, not on account of their religious but their political opinions—is it right that such persons should have to do with the administration of justice? Is it my doctrine that these societies will be political?—is mine an unsupported statement? No; for I have the very highest authority upon this subject, and it was announced upon the very first day of the present session, when speaking in reference to the town-councils in England. The honourable and learned gentleman, the member for Dublin, adverted to the municipal councils in England, used those expressions which I am very sorry to have to quote. I believe the honourable and learned member said upon this subject:—

“‘The sword is fastened in your vitals, and you feel it festering there. You regret the triumph the reformers have gained in the municipal councils. You know that there is not one of these councils that will not be converted into a normal school for teaching the science of political agitation.’”

“These were the expressions of the honourable and learned gentleman with respect to the town-councils. He prophesied of them, that they would be “the normal schools for teaching the science of agitation.””

Mr. O’Connell here exclaimed, “I said peaceful political agitation.”

After a short pause Sir Robert Peel continued—“If, then, this is the case with the town-councils in England, is it likely that the town-councils in Ireland would be free from political agitation? I will read the passage again:—

"England (he said) has received an instalment of what was due to her, and right well has she used it. You have good reason for opposing municipal reform in Ireland. The sword is fastened in your vitals, and you feel it festering there. You regret the triumph the reformers have gained in the municipal councils. You know that there is not one of these councils that will not be converted into a normal school of political agitation."

"If that be true as respects England, is it false with respect to Ireland? If it be true with respect to Ireland, have we not then a right to protest against the administration of justice and the superintendence of the civil power being committed to such hands? I make this appeal, in the greatest confidence in your justice—I make this appeal to you, and through you to public opinion—to that public opinion which, ultimately at least, will be the arbiter between our party disputes—I believe it will not confirm the institution of these schools for inculcating the 'science of agitation.' I do not believe, I cannot think, that their constitution is compatible with religious peace, or that it is compatible with the pure administration of justice. We concede to you the full justice of your demand for equal laws and equal justice. We say that they ought not to be refused; and I, at least, can affirm, on behalf of those for whom I speak, that we are willing to relinquish the advantages that we have gained, and to give up the possession of those exclusive privileges we have enjoyed. When you propose to transfer from the magistrates of Ireland the nomination of the police, I acquiesce at once in the justice of the proposal; for, upon the whole, I believe that a lord-lieutenant will, amidst the heated passions of conflicting parties, appoint those who will be the most fitted and the best calculated to discharge their duties. In deference to your wishes, and in anticipation of the royal command, those

who have been connected with associations that have been endeared to them by time, and with feelings of loyalty and attachments growing out of them, but which you have lately denounced as being calculated to injure the public peace, have promptly abandoned them. The individuals to whom I allude, at the hazard of great sacrifices—for they will have to address men unable, from their station and want of knowledge, to appreciate the motives of their leaders—they, to advance that peace for which you declare yourselves so much interested, have, I say, at once abandoned their old connections, and dissolved their political associations. We ask you, then, publicly, to give us equal laws and equal justice. We ask you not to run the hazard of effecting that which the right honourable gentleman has so much deprecated—the ascendancy of one party and the extermination of another. We ask of you to consider the present state of Ireland—its existing condition of society—and particularly that state of society in reference to the administration of the laws. We ask you to remember that you now recommend a principle which you object to in another condition of affairs—we ask of you to recollect your own doctrines with respect to the administration of the civil power, and the principle you yourselves have laid down to ensure unanimity in its management; and if you have reason to believe, from the present state of party feelings, that annual elections are likely to engender bad passions—if you have reason to believe it will do this—if you have reason to believe that these societies will be converted into normal schools of agitation—I demand of you, will you pass this bill? We ask of you, as you value religious peace—we ask you, as you value equal laws—we ask you, as you value the security and integrity of this great empire—not to lend the sanction of your authority, of your moral and legislative authority, to the constitution in Ireland of normal schools, in which it is avowed the science of agita-

tion shall be carefully taught. But, above all, we demand of you, respectfully, but firmly, that you will not make the graduates in those schools, and the professors in the science of agitation, the chosen instruments to wield the civil force of the state, and to dispense public justice."

The danger of the course thus recommended, was powerfully shown by Mr. Sheil, whose speech may be regarded as a prophetic warning, which, unfortunately for the country, was neglected by the Conservative party. A portion of this remarkable speech is all that we can insert here, but the whole is admirably reported in Hansard, and is well worthy of an attentive perusal.

" I trust that the House agrees fully in the sentiment expressed by the Attorney-General for Ireland, when he protested that if, by the operation of this measure, one ascendancy should be substituted for another, he should be the last person to advocate it. I entertain no doubt that the measure will not be attended with any such result. I look back to the experience of our past measures which were conceived in this liberal spirit, and I can find nothing to warrant such a conclusion. I am myself the representative of the second county in Ireland. Who is my colleague? An Englishman and a Protestant. Who are the representatives of the adjoining county of Waterford? Sir Richard Musgrave and Mr. Villiers Stuart, both Protestants. I might go on and show you, by other instances, that it is not by religious differences, religious predilections, or religious antipathies, we are swayed; and that we only look, in our representatives, for men who are determined to strive their utmost to remedy the substantial grievances of the country. Why do you speak of religious differences? By doing so, you only remind us of what we wish to forget. Let us be plunged in Lethe, and, if it be possible, let us lose the recollection of our dissensions. Have you not, for the last nine months, endeav-

voured, by your auxiliaries, to raise the “No-Popery” cry? Why will not the noble lord—for I must suppose he enjoys their confidence—go to those very potent auxiliaries, and say to them, “For God’s sake, abandon this odious course.” Why will he not endeavour to check the vituperation and contumely with which the people and religion of Ireland have been assailed, and in the exercise of which all the vocabulary of religious rancour has been exhausted? Why are the clergymen of the Church to which I belong called “surpliced ruffians?” Why are the people of Ireland represented as a band of assassins? Why are we ourselves represented as forsaken on the book of the Almighty? Why is it that you have sent your emissaries into my country to enjoin hatred and encourage dissension; and when, in this baneful enterprise, you have, to a certain extent, succeeded—and produced the reaction of an inevitable acrimony in our minds—why do you then say, that because of the religious differences which subsist in Ireland, Ireland is not to receive the same measure of justice as you have already given to England?

“I will not, however, trespass further on the attention of the House. The whole of this case rests not on miserable details, but upon the broad principle of equal justice to Ireland. You are to survey this great engine of legislation not with a microscope, but on a broad and comprehensive scale. The principle which I lay down is this—that England and Ireland must have the same laws—the same municipal reform must be extended to the one country as to the other. You have placed the corporations of England under popular control, and to popular control the corporations of Ireland must and shall be submitted. But who talks of the repeal of the Union? Does the noble lord know that, by refusing this bill to Ireland, he affords but another argument in favour of repeal—whereas, by yielding it, he will strengthen

and render lasting the connection between the two countries?—

. . . . . parbus se legibus, ambæ  
Invictæ gentes æterna in fœdera mittant.

Does he not know that if you refuse us what we call justice, and what your own hearts ought to teach you to be justice—that if you refuse to give us the same laws—the same institutions which other parts of the empire enjoy—you run the most imminent risk of that perilous separation which you contemplate with so much horror and alarm? But if you make the national compact of real avail—if you make us joint-tenants of the rights of the British constitution, and establish a glorious parity between us—if, indeed, you make us even as you are—you will not only destroy the arguments for repeal, but you will extinguish dissension in Ireland:—and that you may do so is the earnest prayer of one ardently anxious for the glory of this great empire, of which that country forms a part—would to God it were a prosperous part!"

The views of the Conservatives, as expounded by Sir Robert Peel, did not lead them to oppose the second reading of the bill, for they concurred with the ministers, in the opinion that the existing system of Irish corporations ought not to endure any longer. But when the motion was made that the House should go into committee, Lord Francis Egerton, who had formerly held the post of Chief Secretary for Ireland, moved that the committee should be empowered to make provision for the abolition of corporations in Ireland, and for such arrangements as might be necessary to their abolition, for securing efficient and impartial administration of justice, and the peace and good government of cities and towns in Ireland. The selection of Lord Francis Egerton on this occasion was most judicious; when known as Lord Francis Leveson Gower, he had been distinguished

for liberal opinions, and had been a zealous advocate of Catholic emancipation ; as Secretary for Ireland, he had been conspicuous for moderation and impartiality ; and the very rarity of his interference in political affairs gave weight and authority to his proceedings. After an animated debate, the instruction to the committee was rejected by a majority of sixty-four, and the measure, as originally framed, finally received the sanction of the Lower House.

It had, however, never been doubtful that the course recommended by the minority in the House of Commons would be adopted, by a large majority, in the House of Lords. When the second reading was moved, Lord Lyndhurst announced the intentions of the Conservatives, in a speech of great and imprudent vehemence. He more than implied, that the prevalence of the Roman Catholic religion in Ireland, was a valid reason for refusing to the Irish people the constitutional privileges which had been beneficially granted to the people of England. He vituperated the Romish religion, and the character of its priesthood, and described the Irish as “aliens in language, religion, and blood.” This speech, and some others of the same character, delivered by that learned lord, were regarded as little short of a declaration of war and exclusion, against the great majority of the Irish people. Religious and political animosities were revived in more than their former intensity, and the influence of O’Connell over the Irish people was immensely strengthened by the belief that he stood between them and a new penal code, which it was believed that the more violent of the tory party were ready to enact. The motion for an instruction to the committee was made by Lord Fitzgerald, who, in 1828, had been defeated by O’Connell, at the memorable election for the county of Clare, and was carried by a majority of eighty-four. The total abolition of all Irish corporations was too strong a measure even

for the Duke of Richmond; he proposed, that the great commercial cities should be entrusted with the management of their own affairs, and specified seven principal towns in which he deemed it advisable that municipalities should be established. But this compromise was too moderate to suit the partisan and violent spirit which had unfortunately seized on the peers, and it was rather contumeliously rejected.

When the same documents made by the Lords were sent down to the Commons, a very angry debate ensued. The Irish members, including many who had been opposed to O'Connell and his agitation, expressed the natural resentment which the invectives of Lord Lyndhurst against their creed and their country had inspired; a faint effort was made to explain away some of the more imprudent expressions of that learned lord, but he had been too explicit to leave any room for evasion; and the insults which he had offered to the people of Ireland long rankled in the national bosom, and became, in after-years, the chief agency in the revival of the Repeal agitation.

Lord John Russell proposed that the amendments of the Lords should be rejected, but at the same time demanded some modifications of the ministerial measure, in the hope of conciliating the more reasonable of his opponents. His proposition was carried by a majority of eighty-six, and the amended bill was sent to the Lords. There, after a very angry debate, in which Lord Lyndhurst exhibited his vituperative powers in greater force than ever, the project of the Commons was rejected by a majority of ninety-nine, and the bill was restored to the state in which it had been sent down from the Lords. The Commons took the dignified course of dropping the measure altogether. Thus ended, for a time, the discussion of a question which, in England, had excited more attention as a trial of the state of parties, than

as a determination of any great principle; but which, in Ireland, was regarded as the index of the feelings with which the people of Ireland were regarded by the rest of their fellow-subjects.

It was an unfortunate error in Sir Robert Peel, to give even an apparent encouragement to the fanatical cry of "No Popery!" on which, substantially, the opposition to the reformed corporations of Ireland was based. But had he not done so, such was then the violent temper of his party, that he would have been ejected from his leadership, and his place would most probably have been supplied by Lords Lyndhurst and Stanley. It is true that Sir Robert Peel gave no direct encouragement to fanaticism; but he had placed himself in a position which incapacitated him from rebuking or checking its excesses. There can be little doubt that he secretly disapproved the mischievous policy which endeavoured to make the anti-papal prejudices of the English people a leverage for the ejection of the whig ministry, heedless of the inevitable consequence that such conduct would necessarily rouse passions in Ireland too powerful to be subdued by the tories when they returned to office, and therefore perilous to the tranquillity, and perhaps to the integrity, of the empire.

A more mischievous agitation was never attempted than that which had for its object to kindle the religious passions of the English people, and direct them against the great bulk of the Irish nation. Unfortunately several clergymen were so far forgetful of their duty, as to engage in this unhallowed enterprise. Some of these reverend missionaries descended to the lowest arts of itinerant agitators; Exeter Hall seemed to have entered into competition with Conciliation Hall for the prize in mischievous buffoonery, and two fluent orators were imported from the sister-kingdom, to aid in exciting English prejudice against the land of their birth, and the

creed of the majority of their countrymen. In England these pranks produced but a slight sensation, especially as one of the agitators, the Rev. Mr. McGhee, was so egregiously simple as to read in public a clever, but patent parody of a papal rescript, as a genuine bull from the Pope. But in Ireland a very dangerous delusion arose from these proceedings ; the Irish Catholics were led to believe that the real opinion of England was represented by the fanatics of Exeter Hall ; they were thus led to believe that they were objects of hatred and scorn to the people of England, and natural resentment induced them to nurture similar feelings in their turn.

The defeat of the Irish Municipal bill was followed by a second party-contest on another Irish question, and had a similar termination. We have already mentioned that the Irish Tithe bill had been rejected in the House of Lords during the preceding session, on account of its containing an appropriation clause. A similar bill, with the same obnoxious clause, was introduced by Lord Morpeth ; an attempt was made by Lord Stanley to get rid of the principle of appropriation, but it was rejected by the Commons. Of course when a similar motion was made in the House of Lords, it succeeded ; but the Commons would not consent to such a change, and the bill, in its altered state, was finally rejected.

Measures for the commutation of tithes in England—for the celebration of marriage by persons not belonging to the Established Church—and for the registration of births, deaths, and marriages, occupied a large share of the attention of parliament ; but, as both parties agreed on their necessity, and scarcely differed on their principles, the discussions to which they gave rise had little public interest. It may, however, be generally stated, that, in all these debates, Sir Robert Peel generally appeared as the patron of the Church, and

Lord John Russell as the advocate of the dissenting interest; both, however, combined to carry into effect the recommendations of a commission issued during Sir Robert Peel's administration, for suppressing the evils of pluralities and non-residence—for new-modelling the episcopal sees in relation to territory and income—and for suppressing sinecure benefices and preferments. Great as were the improvements effected by these measures, they were not sufficiently extensive to gratify the more ardent reformers, and ministers had to encounter a very vexatious opposition from those who were generally their supporters. Mr. O'Connell on this occasion firmly adhered to the ministers, though, as a zealous Romanist, he might have been expected to join in every effort for diminishing the strength of the Protestant Establishment.

Discrepancies of opinion between the Lords and Commons on amending the English municipal bill, on providing for the better administration of charitable trusts, on allowing prisoners the aid of counsel, and on the abolition of imprisonment for debt, were chiefly remarkable for showing that the Lords, after having submitted to dictation on the Reform bill, were now disposed to rush into the opposite extreme, and even to court opportunities for obstinately maintaining a difference of opinion in order to assert their independence. This led to the delay of many useful measures, and the rejection of others, while the pettiness of faction, too often manifested in the debates, wearied the public attention, and led to a general neglect of the reports of speeches in the newspapers. A law reducing the stamp-duty on newspapers from fourpence to one penny was passed with some little difficulty; it was not injurious to finance, while it had a most beneficial moral influence, in checking the circulation of the blasphemous and seditious effusions which formed the staple of the unstamped press.

Acting under very undignified feelings of passion and resentment, Lord Lyndhurst, and the majority of the House of Peers, had treated the people of Ireland with unwarrantable insult and defiance. To vex O'Connell they had irritated a nation. The consequence was the formation of a new and formidable agitation, under the name of a General Association for procuring Justice to Ireland, and more especially an equitable adjustment of the Tithe question, and Municipal Corporations constructed on the same popular basis as those of England. The Catholic aristocracy and gentry, who had held aloof from the Repeal agitation, and many leading Protestant Liberals joined in this new movement, of which Lord Lyndhurst rather than O'Connell, should be regarded as the author. Such a revival of dissension and agitation was most unfortunate at a time when the preparations necessary for the establishment of a new poor-law required the highest exercise of prudence and discretion in all parties.

A tour which the Earl of Mulgrave made through the country parts of Ireland, in his capacity of Lord-Lieutenant, was perversely used to increase the virulence of party spirit. In many places he exercised the prerogative of mercy entrusted to him by his sovereign in liberating criminals sentenced to various terms of imprisonment, on a representation of some favourable circumstances in their case being made by the local authorities. This was stigmatized by the Orange party as an interference with the administration of justice, and a dangerous weakening of the securities provided by law for the protection of life and property. They held a meeting in Dublin, over which the Marquis of Downshire presided, and passed a series of resolutions condemnatory of the government, two of which must be quoted as specimens of the scandalous exaggerations in which the party at that time indulged ; they declared—“ That with the exception of two disastrous periods, namely in 1641 and 1687, the Protestant

churches have never been exposed to so fierce a persecution from their enemies, nor so utterly deserted by those who, as ministers of a Protestant king, and the executive officers of a Protestant government, should be their friends, as they are at this crisis;" and further, "That for the period of three years a practical penal code—worse because more undefined than a penal enactment—has been in operation against the church, the privileges, the lives and properties, of the people of Ireland, abridging their civil and religious liberties, sapping their industry, endangering the security of their possessions, and exposing their persons to persecution and violence."

It was to be expected that the concoctors of these resolutions, most of whom were members of the legislature, should have opened the session of 1837 by proposing the impeachment of the ministers whom they had accused as the authors of their wrongs. But this was an undertaking beyond their courage; they confined themselves to complaining of the National Association, and to vituperating the appointment of barristers who belonged to that association as law-officers of the crown. Sir Robert Peel was sadly perplexed by his Irish supporters; he saw clearly that their real ground of complaint was the determination of the government to act on the principles of his own measure of 1829, and to carry fairly into effect the objects of the act of Catholic Emancipation; he therefore supported the Irish members of the ascendancy-party with a reluctant coldness, which they could not fail to perceive, and of which they very bitterly complained. Sir James Graham and Lord Stanley, however, evinced ardour sufficient to gratify the most rampant Orangeman, and the renewed debate on the Irish corporation bill in 1837, was marked by a series of brilliant invectives and bitter personalities, which tended to excite into dangerous

rancour the hostility of parties, and to divide Ireland between the camps of adverse factions.

This course is the more to be regretted, as Sir Robert Peel had, some time before, given to the world a profession of liberal and constitutional policy, with which his opposition to municipal reform in Ireland was not very consistent. He had been put in nomination for the Lord Rectorship of the University of Glasgow in opposition to Sir John Campbell, and had been elected by a great majority ; his visit to Glasgow, early in January, for the purpose of installation, was made the occasion of a magnificent banquet to his honour, on the part of his political friends and admirers in Scotland. An immense temporary saloon was erected, and tables laid for more than three thousand guests. In the number were included many persons who had supported the Reform bill, —a circumstance to which Sir Robert Peel adverted in his speech, with evident satisfaction :—“I want not,” said he, “to taunt you with re-action or conversion , but I say that if you adhere to the principles which you professed in 1830, it is here you ought to come. You consented to a reform, to which you were invited in a speech delivered by your sovereign, expressly on the condition that it should be according to the acknowledged principles of the constitution. Let us have no mistake on that point; *I see the necessity of widening the foundations on which the defence of our constitution and of our religious establishments must rest.*”

He then went on to ask of the reformers present, whether they adhered to the principle on which the Reform bill was advocated by its authors ; that is, as a means of improving and preserving the settled institutions of the country. He contended that the reformers should not leave to him, who was taunted with being a *conformer*, the defence of their own measure, but that they should prove it to be what they had

contended it was, consistent with the principles of the British constitution. He agreed with them that the machine of government should not be allowed to stand still, he wished to see it perform its proper, its healthful office ; but he would not sanction constant intermeddling with the essential functions of the machinery.

"But," he continued, "let us come to the main point; for I do not wish to conciliate your confidence or support by hoisting false colours. I mean to support the national establishments which connect Protestantism with the State in the three countries." At this declaration the whole assembly is described as rising in one mass, and responding unto it by prolonged and most enthusiastic applause. He went on,—"then again I avow to you, that I mean to support in its full integrity the House of Lords, as an essential and indispensable condition to the maintenance of the constitution under which we live. Do you also concur in that expression of opinion?" (Here there was a loud and universal shout of assent,)—"If you do," he continued, "it is a timely declaration of it. The hour has arrived when, if these are our feelings, we must be prepared to act on them."

In conclusion, Sir Robert Peel said,—"I have long fought the battles of the constitution; but I never despaired, I never doubted that the old, the ancient hearts of England and Scotland would rally round the institutions of their common country—with what a feeling of confidence then shall I now return to take my part in the same conflict! The disturbing influence of foreign example has diminished—the dazzling illusions of 'the three glorious days' have passed away; the affections of the people are visibly gravitating again to their old centre—full of a respect for property, a love of rational freedom, and an attachment to long-established institutions. From these walls I trust a spirit will go forth to animate the desponding, and encourage the

timid. I look abroad from the spot on which I now stand, to the moral influence of that opinion which constitutes the cheap defence of nations.—I look to it for the maintenance of that system of government, which protects the rich from spoliation, and the poor from oppression.—I look to that spirit which will range itself under no tawdry banner of revolution, but unfurl and rally round

The flag that braved a thousand years  
The battle and the breeze.

Yes, I feel not a shadow of doubt that it will continue to float in triumph, and that the constitution, tried as it has been the storms of adversity, will come forth purified and fortified in the rooted convictions, the feelings, the affections of a religious, a moral, and a patriotic people."

If we compare this with the declaration of principles made by Lord Morpeth, on behalf of himself and his colleagues, about the same time, at a dinner given in Leeds, to celebrate his return for the West Riding of Yorkshire, it will be difficult to discover any essential difference of opinion between Sir Robert Peel and the Whig ministry. "I value," said Lord Morpeth, who then held the office of Secretary for Ireland, "I value, and will do my utmost to maintain, the constitution; but under its broad and expansive shade, I would remove every obstacle, and clear every avenue of access to every class, to every creed, to every race that owns its sway and courts its shelter. I would proceed in reducing and removing all the remainder of exclusive privileges and monopolies by which one class of our countrymen may be benefited to the exclusion of the rest. I would give to religious, as well as to civil freedom, the most unobstructed range; and, above all, I would desire to banish from our temples and altars the clash of sordid disputes and civil bickerings. And while I would thus advance with the age in which I live, adapting the framework of our polity to

surrounding circumstances, clinging to no abuse because it is ancient, and shrinking from no improvement because it is a change ; I own at the same time that I should feel little disposed to desert that party of which it pleases some to predicate that it is verging upon extinction, and can never again emerge to power and popularity in England. Well, then, be it so. The destinies of individuals, and of parties, and of empires, are beyond the ken of common calculation ; but to whatever depth of obscurity myself or my friends may be consigned, it will be sufficient for me as an individual to remember that in four successive elections, I have borne your colours to victory ; it will be sufficient for me, as a member of a party, to recollect that in four short years, we have reformed the representation of the people in parliament —reformed and opened the municipal corporations in England and Scotland—swept from our blushing records the demon-eode of slavery—opened wide the seas and shores of the globe to British trade and enterprise. And thus, the legislation of four short years—let the over-timid and the over-bold mark this—has been achieved without one form of the constitution being violated—without one breach of the law being countenanced—without one drop of human blood having been spilled.”

From this it appears that the difficulty in the way of a combination of parties did not lie in the principles or the measures to which their leaders had severally committed themselves ; it consisted much rather in the persons to whom they had virtually and severally pledged their faith. Lords Melbourne, Russell, and Morpeth could not have consented to retain office on the condition of abandoning their Irish friends, who had in fact but lately helped them into it ; and it would perhaps have been still more difficult to have included Mr. O'Connell and his tail in any new ministerial combination, however liberal or comprehensive. Peel, on the

other hand, could not abandon such men as Lord Lyndhurst, Lord Stanley, and Sir James Graham, to say nothing of the Duke of Wellington, for they had been too bitter and too violent in their opposition to be received again as colleagues.

But this close approximation between ministers and their opponents greatly increased the difficulties of administering the affairs of the country. There was no great question by which popular enthusiasm could be excited in their favour, so as to counterbalance the factious hostility which they encountered in the House of Lords, and the secret dislike with which they were regarded by the King. On the other hand, Sir Robert Peel had great difficulty in finding a favourable battle-ground ; no topic presented itself on which a plausible excuse could be based for ejecting a ministry, and the tactics adopted by the opposition were directed to surrounding the course of the cabinet with so many impediments and embarrassments as to induce its members to throw up their situations, either in disgust or in despair.

Such, indeed, seemed likely to be the solution of the ministerial difficulties : during the debate on the Irish corporation bill, the Whigs more than once intimated a purpose of retiring from office, if the country did not give them warmer encouragement and support. In the debate on the third reading of this measure, Sir Robert Peel thus forcibly alluded to these rumours, and took the opportunity of intimating his own readiness to resume the direction of affairs :—

“ I know not,” he said, “ what is the meaning of the vague intimation on the part of his Majesty’s government, of their intention of relinquishing office ; I know not what is proposed by this,—I view the intimation with great indifference. I am not at all surprised at their desire to relinquish office—at the great desire to relinquish their present position. I taunt them not with the desire to retain office. I believe, in the

present position of public affairs, few men would be tempted to take office and encounter their difficulties, unless they were impelled by a high sense of public duty. (Cheers and laughter from several honourable members.) Oh, Sir, look at the position of public men—look at the position of your foreign affairs."

(Here there were loud cheers from the opposition benches,) in which Lord Palmerston joined, and at the same time half rose from his seat, intimating, by a significant gesture, his readiness to defend the course of his foreign policy on a fitting occasion. This brief interlude caused some sensation ; when it had subsided, Sir Robert Peel continued,—“ I am glad to see a smile on the noble lord’s face. Oh, the noble lord has a right to smile with respect to the position in which this country stands to Russia, to the great Powers of the North, to Spain, to France, and, indeed, with respect to every other country with which he has had to do, since he has held the seals of his present office. (Mr. M. J. O’Connell—“ Question ! question ! ”) This is the question—this is the material and pinching part of the question. Look at the state of commercial embarrassment in which the country is placed. Look at the state of employment in many of your manufacturing districts. Look at the state of the governments of the three great Powers of the West of Europe at this hour. In France no government existing—in Spain no government existing—and in England a doubt arises from day to day whether there be a government or not. Look, also, at the state of the public business before this House. Hundreds of questions of the utmost importance are launched for public consideration, but scarcely one of them proceeds to a discussion. From day to day a great variety of propositions is made, but no advance towards the consideration of any. What has hitherto been done in the course of the present session ? What measures of importance

have been passed and sent up to the House of Lords in the course of the present session, upon which the noble lord seems so disposed to pride himself? Certainly, measures of the utmost importance have been propounded by the government, but I see no advance made to bring any of these to a satisfactory conclusion; nor has any of them, except the measure now under consideration, been advanced to anything like a final result. The Irish Poor Law bill and the Church-rate measure have been introduced, but, if you go through the whole of the parliamentary history, I do not believe that you will find a period when the public business was ever before in such a state as it is now. Again, look at the state of your colonial policy. I say this in reference to those who believe that there are parties seeking by low intrigues to possess themselves of the offices of the government, and to enjoy the satisfaction of attempting to bring all these measures to a conclusion and settlement. I cannot look at the state of public affairs, and believe that any man, at this time, would seek, from any other motives but those of public duty, to enter into the service of the public. But this I do not hesitate to say, that if his Majesty's government should seek the pretext of abandoning their offices and escaping from the difficulties with which they are surrounded—I do not hesitate to say, that I believe there is spirit and energy enough in this country to find compensation for their loss; and if the crew should abandon this noble vessel amongst the breakers, I do not believe that she is yet so unmanageable but that the country would lend its support to those who would be inclined to make an effort for the protection of the precious interests with which she is freighted, and to rescue her from the dangers which appear to surround her position."

On the question of establishing Poor Laws in Ireland, Sir Robert Peel cordially supported Lord John Russell, in insist-





Engr'd by S. T. P. from a drawing by

Engraved by J. C. Moreton

SIR FRANCIS BURDETT BART M.P.

Engr'd on' 13. 1841

F. Burdett

ing that the system should be as similar as possible to the amended Poor Law in England. Circumstances, however, occurred which prevented the ministerial measure from being completed during the session, and which equally prevented parliament from coming to a decision on the means proposed for redressing the grievances produced by Church-rates in England, and tithes in Ireland.

A strange political incident about this time showed that the popular enthusiasm on which the Whigs relied, had been succeeded by apathy, and almost by downright hostility. The liberal party among the electors of Westminster, had been for some time dissatisfied with the state of the representation of their city ; and not without reason. Colonel Evans had been two sessions absent from his post, in command of the British legion in Spain ; and during the same period his distinguished colleague, Sir Francis Burdett, had scarcely given a vote in his place in parliament. Ill health was alleged in excuse for his absence ; but it was suspected that his chief motive for withdrawing from political life was a growing dislike to the Whigs, a coldness to the cause of “the movement” in which he had so long been a leader, and an intense hatred of O’Connell, and of the influence which he was supposed to exercise over the administration.

At a meeting of the liberal electors of Westminster, resolutions were passed expressive of their dissatisfaction with the state of the representation of their city, and measures were taken for inviting both their members to resign their seats. Sir Francis Burdett promptly responded to the call. He vacated his seat by accepting the Chiltern Hundreds, and then presented himself for re-election. His address was an undisguised declaration of hostility against the parties with which he had hitherto acted. He called upon the electors to struggle with him against “an unnatural alliance, an odious, yet hideous combination of Irish agitators, Popish priests, and paid

patriots, operating upon a well-intentioned, but also a weak and vacillating administration."

Mr. Leader, the candidate selected by the Whigs and Radicals, vacated his seat at Bridgewater to oppose Sir Francis Burdett, but the electors of Westminster could not persuade themselves that their old friend and favourite, the popular baronet, had deserted his ancient principles; the whole Tory party supported him, and by their combination with those liberals who adhered to him from the remembrance of his former services, returned him by a large majority. Sir Francis soon showed the liberals that they had reposed their confidence unwisely. He took his seat on the opposition benches, and, on the question of Church-rates, delivered a violent speech against the party with which he had acted through his whole political life. This was a course too decisive to be mistaken, and the liberals who had supported him at the late election gave vent to their dissatisfaction in no measured terms.

The House of Commons was brought into collision with the Courts of Law by a publisher of obscene books, named Stockdale, bringing an action against the parliamentary printers, for publishing, under the authority of the House, a Report on Prisons, in which the dangerous nature of his books was strongly reprobated. Lord John Russell and Sir Robert Peel both concurred in supporting parliamentary privilege; resolutions were adopted, affirming, to the full extent, the power of the House to order the publication of all such papers as it shall think conducive to the public interests; and declaring it a breach and contempt of the privileges of parliament to call such publication into question. Several, however, of the Conservatives dissented from these views, and Sir R. H. Inglis proposed an amendment, which, however, was negatived by a large majority.

Sir Robert Peel also differed from Lord Stanley, and many

other Conservatives, in approving the conciliatory policy which the ministers had adopted for settling the disturbances in the Canadas; and though he dissented from the course of foreign policy adopted by Lord Palmerston, he took care to disavow anything like sympathy in the cause of Don Carlos.

The session was more than usually unproductive: the Conservative majority in the Lords, and the Liberal majority in the House of Commons, had taken up positions of mutual obstruction, and had each displayed an obstinacy of spirit, which forbade all hope of a compromise between them. Thus the session was approaching the period which is usually assigned for its close, and scarcely a single one of the measures, which had been recommended for consideration in the royal speech at the commencement, had been brought to a close. The constitutional remedy for such a state of things, would have been a dissolution of parliament; for the existing House of Commons having been elected during Sir Robert Peel's brief administration, could not be supposed the most favourable to his successors. The king, however, was strongly opposed to such a measure, and would have rejoiced to see his ministers forced to tender their resignation. An unexpected solution of the difficulty was presented by the illness of the king, which, early in June, exhibited symptoms of approaching dissolution. He died at Windsor, on the 20th of June, in the seventy-second year of his age, and within a few days of the completion of the seventh of his reign.

William IV. was a monarch beloved rather than respected; every one recognized his good intentions; but his judgment was not strong, and, contrary to the prevailing disposition of his family, he was easily moved from his purpose by the influence of others. He was affable and courteous from natural benignity of disposition; simple in all his tastes and habits, sincerely anxious to perform everything which he

considered to be a duty, and to promote the welfare of the people over whom he had been unexpectedly called to reign. For this reason he was a zealous promoter of reform in parliament, but soon became alarmed at the consequences, especially when he found that it diminished the power of the crown in the effective choice of its ministers. His queen was still more averse to the Reform party ; her cherished associates were Conservatives, and she appears to have adopted some of their exaggerated alarms at the increased strength given to the democratic element in the British constitution. Had the king's life been protracted another year, he would probably have been brought into perplexing collision with the people, by attempting to form some new ministerial combinations.

By the death of William IV., Hanover, in which the succession is regulated by the Salic law, was separated from Great Britain, to which it had been united for a century and a quarter. Ernest, Duke of Cumberland, became its king ; and his removal from England strengthened materially the Conservative party, which had suffered much from being involved in his unpopularity.

Victoria, niece of William IV., ascended the throne ; she was the daughter of the Duke of Kent, who had been warmly attached to the Liberal party, and, with the Duke of Sussex, had, on that account, been regarded with coldness and distrust by the rest of the royal family. On the death of the duke, his widow and daughter were involved in some pecuniary difficulties, from which they were extricated by loans of money tendered generously by some leading Whig families. This circumstance naturally formed a connection between the Duchess of Kent and the Whig party ; the daughters of the Whig nobility were the companions of the Princess Victoria in her youth, and naturally occupied the chief places in her court after she ascended the throne. Stability was

thus unexpectedly given to the tottering ministry ; the queen's adoption of her late uncle's cabinet was not simply mechanical and passive ; she was anxious to make an active demonstration in favour of their principles, and to give the influence of her name to that portion of their policy which had been the most rigidly and harshly canvassed. By the queen's direction, Lord John Russell addressed a letter to Earl Mulgrave, the Lord-Lieutenant of Ireland, in which he informed him that "the queen had commanded him to express to his excellency her majesty's entire approbation of his past conduct, and her desire that he should continue to be guided by the same principles on which he had hitherto acted." The letter concluded in these terms—"I am commanded to express to you her majesty's cordial wishes for the continued success of your administration, and your excellency may be assured that your efforts will meet with firm support from her majesty."

But this declaration of opinion produced no very marked effect on the elections which took place on the demise of the crown. Their connection with the New Poor Law had rendered the ministers very unpopular in the agricultural districts ; and the Conservative candidates, though they approved the measure as much as the Whigs, and were as fairly committed to its support, did not scruple most unscrupulously to avail themselves of this topic, as a means of annoyance to their adversaries. In England, the elections made very little change in the relative strength of parties. The Whigs were defeated in most of the counties where there was a contest ; but they gained some compensating victories in the boroughs. In Ireland and Scotland the ministerial strength was increased. The most significant result of the elections was the proof they afforded of the declining influence of extreme or Radical opinions. Mr. Grote, who, at his first election, had triumphantly headed the poll for the

city of London, was returned only by a majority of six over his Conservative opponent; Mr. Roebuck was defeated at Bath; Mr. Ewart, at Liverpool; Colonel Thompson, at Hull; and Mr. Hume was rejected from the county of Middlesex. In the municipal elections at the close of the year, there was a similar manifestation of dislike for the advocates of extreme opinions; in many places they were defeated by very moderate Reformers, and in some by avowed Conservatives. Organic changes were no longer popular in the country; there was rather a desire for strengthening and consolidating our institutions, than for giving them any further extension. In such a temper of the nation, there was nothing likely to produce any violent excitement, or to rouse popular opinion to pronounce vehemently in favour of either of the great parties which divided the state.





HIS ROYAL HIGHNESS PRINCE  
AUGUSTUS FREDERICK, DUCHESS OF SUSSEX &c. R. G. K. T. G. C. H. P. C. &c. &c.

*Augustus Frederick*

## CHAPTER II.

## THE MELBOURNE MINISTRY CONTINUED.

To obtain a strong ministry, by some new fusion and combination of political parties, had been the earnest wish of the late monarch at the close of his reign. A similar desire was felt by the new sovereign, by the great body of the nation, and we believe by the ministers themselves, who had become very weary of the O'Connell alliance, and were furthermore not on the best of terms with their radical supporters. Reports that such a coalition was contemplated, were very rife at the time when the new parliament was about to assemble in November; and the very general terms in which the Queen's speech was prepared, seemed to afford some countenance to the rumour. In the House of Lords, the address was moved by his Royal Highness the Duke of Sussex, and seconded by Lord Portman. The Duke of Wellington warmly assented to it, and expressed his cordial wishes for her Majesty's prosperity and happiness.

In the House of Commons, an unexpected and singular discussion was raised by Mr. Wakley, the popular member for Finsbury. He said that he rose to remind ministers that they had some *Radical* supporters in the House, a circumstance which they seemed to have forgotten. He ended a long and able speech by moving an amendment in favour of the extension of the suffrage. Several other members having taunted the ministers with desertion of their reform-principles, Lord John Russell rose reluctantly to reply, but he did so with characteristic manliness and

candour, declaring his resolution to stand by the principles of the Reform Bill, and to resist extension of the suffrage, vote by ballot, and triennial parliaments. Sir Robert Peel significantly congratulated the noble lord on his firmness, and asserted that the opinions of the people had undergone a real change, and was now decidedly favourable to the maintenance of existing institutions. The amendment having been negatived, Mr. Wakley observed, that he had succeeded in having proved that there was at any rate *a coalition of principles* between the two great aristocratic parties, which had been previously in opposition, and that further reform could be expected from neither. Lord John Russell's implied assertion of "the finality of the Reform Bill," gave great offence to the Radicals, and though his subsequent explanations tended to soothe asperities, perfect confidence between the two sections of the liberal party was never wholly restored.

Lord Brougham took an early opportunity of declaring himself a bitter opponent of his former colleagues. The personal dislike of the King had been assigned as a reason for excluding him from the cabinet of 1835, but this excuse was at an end on the accession of Queen Victoria, and yet he was not invited to resume office. He bore his exclusion badly, and resented it the more vindictively, as he found that he was not likely to be forced on his old colleagues by the opinion of the country. Unfortunately the bitterness and imprudence of his resentment tended to convince those who had been his warmest admirers.

The first important subject which engaged the attention of parliament was the arrangement of the civil list, out of which arose an inquiry into the nature and amount of the pensions granted by the crown. This inquiry, proposed by Mr. D. W. Harvey, was at first resisted by the ministers. Subsequently, however, the Chancellor of the Exchequer

(Mr. Spring Rice, since Lord Mounteagle) proposed that a committee of inquiry should be granted, which was vehemently opposed by the leading Conservatives, as unnecessary and unjust. Sir Robert Peel's remonstrances were more than usually effective. Having stated that between 1769, the date of the first pension on the list, and 1834, there had been eleven prime ministers responsible for the grants made during that period, and that only three of these survived, he thus continued,—

“I ask the gentleman, whoever he may be (it cannot be the Chancellor of the Exchequer), who is a candidate for the honour of the future chair of this committee, whether he anticipates any very useful or agreeable duty? I ask you, the House of Commons, whether you will sanction this ‘fruitless and disgusting inquiry,’ which, seven years since, your predecessors refused to enter into? Remember, that your position is different from theirs; that seven more years have elapsed—that a whole reign has intervened—that evidence which might have been had in 1831 is no longer attainable in 1837—that expectations entertained in 1831, founded upon the uniform preceding usage, have been converted into certainty by the deliberate readoption of that usage. Remember, that of the whole list of the pensions there is but a fraction for which any living minister can answer; that those ministers who, fretted to premature decay by the restless agitation of political life, are now in their graves, entertained, and were justified in entertaining, different views from yours with regard to the grant of pensions. They little dreamed, after rewarding with a moderate pension the faithful services of some confidential servant, the depository of all their secrets, the sharer of all their labours; that years after their death, in the absence, possibly, of all evidence, the motives of the grant would be scrutinized with

unsparing severity, and tried by inapplicable tests and new and unheard-of principles.

“ Consider the life—the life of intolerable labour and care—the briefness of the career—the causes of the death of many of those who have reached the summit of precarious power in this country ! Look back upon the history of this country, from 1804 to 1830, a period of twenty-six years, and you will find that death has swept away all the ministers, with two exceptions, who had successively presided over the destinies of this country during that eventful period, and that the united tenure of office by these two embraces only three out of twenty-six years. Call to mind the fate of Castlereagh, of Canning, of Liverpool, whose deaths were hastened by their devotedness to the service of their country ! I shall never forget the words addressed to myself by Lord Liverpool but a few days before that fatal blow which ended in his decease, when I remarked to him, with satisfaction, that I thought him looking better than I had seen him for some time previously. ‘ Ah ! ’ was Lord Liverpool’s reply, ‘ no man knows what it is to have been the Prime Minister of England for seventeen years, and never, during that period, to have received his letters by the post in the morning without a feeling of anxiety and apprehension.’ The ministers are in their graves. These pensions were granted by their advice. They are unable to give an account of them, or of the grounds upon which they were given. Do you think it just—do you think it decorous towards their memories, to ransack with severity their advice to their sovereign with respect to the distribution of the royal favour ? Would it have been fitting to do so in 1830 ? Is it tolerable in 1837 ?

“ William IV. has descended into the tomb of his ancestors. He has been succeeded by a sovereign in the bloom of youth and promise. That painful and revolting inquiry

which we would not sanction when a king of mature age ascended the throne—shall we insist upon it now? Shall we take advantage of the tender age and unsuspecting confidence of a youthful Queen, to demand those scrutinies into acts of royal power, which were characterized at a previous accession, not merely as fruitless, but disgusting? There is not a pension on the list which was not granted as the reward of service or the mark of favour by the grandfather of the present Queen, George III., or the succeeding sovereigns her uncles. Shall her first act be to question the exercise of their discretionary favour, and put upon their trial the objects of their bounty? Shall she, who is the fountain of honour, of grace, of privilege, of favour, be forced to this act of unusual severity and harshness? You have offered to her the respectful assurance that the Commons of England will make ample provision for all that can contribute to her personal comfort, or enable her to maintain the high dignity of her exalted station. Let not the kind and grateful feelings which this assurance must excite in her mind be inibittered by the sad reflection that she of all sovereigns is the first who has been called upon to depart from the liberal and generous usages of her ancestors—the first upon whom has been imposed the harsh and painful necessity of rudely invading those family settlements and domestic arrangements, which were made in just reliance upon the permanence of royal protection.”

Notwithstanding this pathetic appeal, and the still more energetic protestations of Lord Stanley, the motion for a committe of inquiry was carried by a large majority. The refusal to place Mr. D. W. Harvey on the committe led to some difference between the ministers, and a section of their radical supporters; but a more serious collision arose out of the insurrection in Lower Canada, which was not only defended, but advocated by Mr. Leader, Mr. Warburton,

Mr. Hume, and some others. As usual, when ministers happened to be directly at issue with their radical allies, the leading members of the Conservative party took little or no part in the debate. It was, however, soon found, that sympathy with the revolted Canadians was not popular, and the insurrection itself, in consequence of the cowardice and incapacity of its leaders, was easily suppressed.

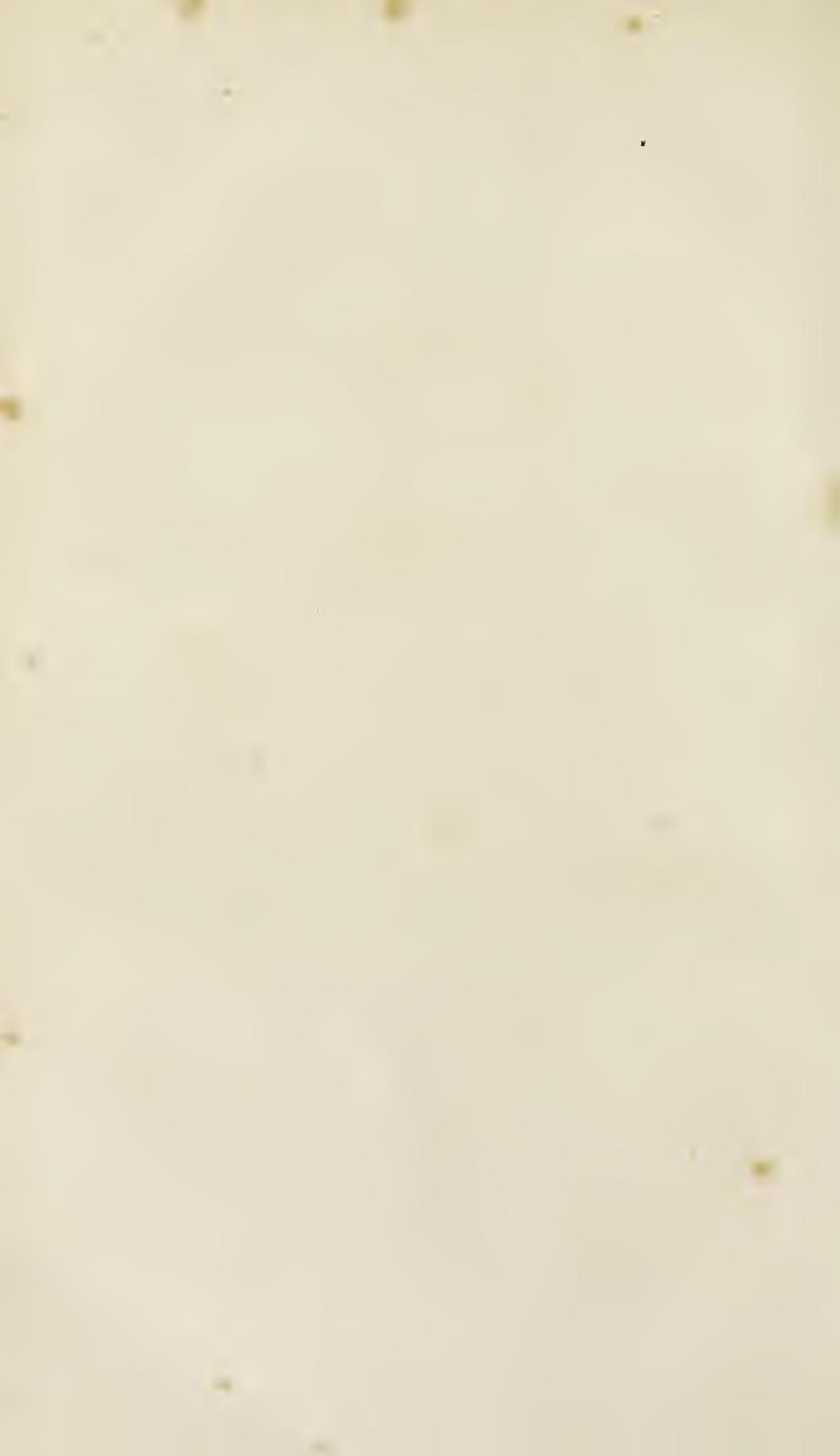
But the troubles of ministers did not end with the suppression of the insurrection. They introduced and carried a measure for suspending the Canadian constitution until the year 1840, and empowering the governor and council, in the mean time, to issue ordinances which should have the force of laws, unless disallowed by the government at home. Ministers selected Lord Durham as the person most fit to exercise these dictatorial powers in Canada; but from the moment of his appointment, he was assailed, personally and politically, with a bitterness beyond the usual limits of party hostility. Lord Brougham took the lead in this persecution of his former colleague; he assailed the ordinance by which some of the leaders of the insurrection had been transported to Bermuda, and compelled the ministers to disallow it as illegal. Lord Durham immediately resigned, and returned home. Scarcely had he quitted Canada, when the insurrection was again renewed, and again suppressed. Sir John Colborne had some of the ring-leaders tried by martial law; they were convicted, and executed. Such a series of events proved most embarrassing to a weak ministry; in the Lords they were in a minority; in the Commons they had but a narrow majority; and yet they were expected to display a strength, vigour, and promptitude equal to, or, rather, greater than could reasonably have been expected from any cabinet formed in England during the entire century.

Sir Francis Burdett did not offer himself as a candidate for Westminster in the new parliament; he was returned for one



THE RT HONBLE JOHN GEORGE LAMPTON EARL OF DURHAM

Buckham



of the divisions of Wiltshire, and from thenceforth became conspicuous as a leader of what was called the country, or old Tory party. Lord Brougham himself did not surpass him in hostility to the party which he had abandoned. His animosity was chiefly displayed against O'Connell and his Irish supporters ; he joined in a subscription raised by Mr. Spottiswoode and others, for the purpose of contesting the validity of Irish elections, a measure of doubtful legality, which Mr. W. Smith O'Brien brought before the House of Commons. An angry but rather desultory debate, protracted in various forms over several nights, ensued. Sir Francis Burdett's desertion of his party was very severely censured, and his vindication of himself evinced far more of passion than of power. Sir Robert Peel took the opportunity of vindicating Sir Francis Burdett and others, who, after having supported the Reform bill, had become alarmed at the further organic changes demanded by the extreme Radicals. It was indeed, on winning the support of such gentlemen, that Sir Robert Peel chiefly relied for his speedy return to power ; and hence, in his vindication of Sir Francis Burdett, he took care to suggest excuses which might serve to afford a plausible justification to the lukewarm, for abandoning the Whigs.

"I do not admit," said he, "of the charge of inconsistency as applied to the honourable baronet. [Cries of, oh ! oh ! from members on the ministerial benches.] I repeat it. I have long been opposed to the honourable baronet ; but the position of the honourable baronet at this moment is that of many other individuals of the highest character, respectability, and intelligence, in this country. The honourable baronet did struggle, it is true, for parliamentary reform ; he did, in violent language if you please, denounce the aggressions of the peers and the boroughmongering system ; but I never did hear the honourable baronet, even at the most

inflamed periods of party-politics—I never did hear him say that, when reform should be granted, he would still want to see the monarchy abolished, or the privileges of the House of Peers invaded, undermined, and extinguished. In him, who so mainly by his efforts has substituted the system of representation which now prevails in place of that which he found established—in him, I deem that it is quite consistent to say, ‘having now attained that which I so long sought for, I am perfectly satisfied.’ But when encroachments are made upon the privileges of other constituent bodies of the Legislature, he has the acuteness to perceive—he has the manliness to face the attacks that might be made upon them; and when he stood up to oppose the attacks that might so be made upon the privileges of the monarchy, the peerage, and other branches of the constitution, well might he say to his defamers, I laugh to scorn your charge of inconsistency; I have done enough to disprove it. I glory in reform—in improved representation of the people; but I will stand up for the intact privileges of the other estates.

“The honourable baronet did struggle for Roman Catholic emancipation, as it was called. He was amongst the most zealous, the most powerful, and the most successful advocates of that measure. The Roman Catholics of Ireland entertained a different opinion of the honourable baronet from that which the honourable and learned gentleman the member for Dublin expressed, when upon two occasions they saw the honourable baronet bringing forward the Roman Catholic petitions; and when I read those expressions of gratitude for the honourable baronet’s services which had flowed from the Roman Catholics of Ireland, and were conveyed as the ‘resolutions’ of their body, I must say, I did not expect that one of the chief amongst the Roman Catholics of Ireland would denounce the honourable baronet, not only for the present opinions which he entertains, but on account of his past

political conduct, asserting that in his youth, and throughout his manhood, the honourable baronet had done no good whatever to the popular cause—the cause of which that honourable and learned gentleman has always been so strenuous, and, I say it without flattery, so successful an advocate. Here, again, I must declare, that, whilst we have the honourable baronet contending for the complete relief of the Roman Catholics from their disabilities, and the annihilation of all distinctions on account of differences in religion, I never yet did hear the honourable baronet maintain that it was an indispensable ingredient in, and a necessary consequence of the removal of, the Roman Catholic disabilities, that the securities of the Protestant Church should be endangered. And, moreover, having succeeded in removing these disabilities, and placing the Roman Catholics on a footing of perfect equality, so far from being inconsistent, it was real consistency—it was absolute conformity with every principle which the honourable baronet had ever avowed,—to say, ‘Now those disabilities are removed, I shall not, if I can prevent it, endanger the security of the Protestant institutions.’ And now, again, seeing the injustice and the danger, and having the manliness to perceive it, the honourable baronet says, ‘I will stand here, as I have done, with respect to the peerage and the crown; I will take my stand here, in defence of the Protestant establishments of the country.’”

It may be doubted, whether the course pursued by Sir Robert Peel on this occasion was consistent with sound or generous policy. It was scarcely fair to insinuate that the safety of the Protestant institutions of the country was endangered by the course of administration adopted by the Whigs; the adoption of such a calumny could not do them half the mischief which it was sure to entail on their successors in Ireland. There was a very general feeling that the great bond of union among the Conservatives was hostility to

the Irish people and to the Catholic religion. This feeling was much strengthened in Ireland by the part which Peel took in the debate, and particularly by his vindication of the Spottiswoode subscription. The decisions of the elections-committees in the new parliament were open to quite enough of suspicion, without the additional element of special funds being raised to unseat particular members. O'Connell, in a speech out of doors, broadly charged the Tory members with "foul perjury" in their judicial capacities; and Lord Maidstone, instead of allowing the phrase to pass as part of the unworthy system of vituperation in which the great agitator habitually indulged, brought the subject before the House. After a very angry and unsatisfactory debate, a motion that Mr. O'Connell should be reprimanded by the Speaker was carried by a majority of twenty-nine. The reprimand was administered with great dignity, but it was received with supreme indifference; and no sooner had the Speaker resumed his seat, than O'Connell repeated the offensive charge, though in milder and more measured terms.

Sir Robert Peel did not long persevere in the course of policy which his sanction of the Spottiswoode subscription seemed to imply. A desire was evinced on both sides in parliament, that some arrangement, based on a system of reciprocal concession, should be effected with respect to the great Irish questions of the poor-law, the municipal corporations, and tithes. The wiser and more moderate part of the Conservatives felt that the total abolition of municipal government in Ireland, might not unreasonably be regarded as an injury and an insult to that country; they were therefore anxious to modify an opposition, of which they were thoroughly weary and partially ashamed. On the other hand, the ministers, on reviewing their forces in the new parliament, saw clearly enough that they could not, under existing circumstances, renew the discussion of the appropria-

tion clause. That clause had, indeed, become distasteful to the Irish members themselves ; and it was generally known that the leading members of the National Education Board in Ireland, including the Protestant and Catholic archbishops of Dublin, had resolved to resign their situations, rather than co-operate in carrying such an invidious measure into execution. It became, therefore, an understanding between Lord John Russell and Sir Robert Peel, that the latter should, in consideration of the sacrifice of the obnoxious clause by the ministers, abandon his opposition to the principle involved in the ministerial project for re-constructing the municipal corporations of the sister island.

On the 27th of March, Lord John Russell asked Sir Robert Peel, as leader of the opposition, whether it was the intention of any of his party to move an instruction to the committee on the Irish Municipal Corporation bill ?

Sir Robert Peel said that he should first have an answer to the question—"What course it was the intention of her Majesty's government to pursue with regard to the Irish Tithe bill, and the interests of the Irish church ?" Having read the passage of the Queen's speech which related to this subject, he thus continued—"We assured her Majesty, in reply, that 'we were deeply sensible of the importance of those questions which her Majesty had committed to us, and of the necessity of treating them in that spirit of impartiality and justice which afforded the best hope of bringing them to a happy and useful termination.' Now, as more than four months have elapsed since that speech was delivered, and as it has been hitherto the uniform custom that her Majesty's ministers have not advised their sovereign to introduce in the speech from the throne matters with respect to which their minds were not made up and the measures prepared, I conclude I may assume that her Majesty's government have made up their minds with respect to the tithe measure.

for Ireland, and that when that address was voted, they were determined, at least, as to what they would propose as the principle of the measure. I find entered on the journals of parliament these resolutions, and they may be considered as still being in force”—

An honourable member here interrupted with a cry of “Question, question!”

Sir Robert Peel, after a short pause, resumed in a more animated tone—“I did not seek this. The position in which I am placed is rather an unusual one. I am endeavouring to lay the foundation of an answer to the question of the noble lord. I say, I find these resolutions on the journals of the House:—‘That this House resolve itself into a committee of the whole House, to consider the temporalities of the Church of Ireland.’ ‘That it is the opinion of this committee, that any surplus which may remain, after fully providing for the spiritual instruction of the members of the established church in Ireland, ought to be applied, locally, to the general education of all classes of Christians.’ These resolutions were voted by a former House of Commons, at the instance of the noble lord, who is now the leader of the House; and coupling them with the speech from the throne, I think myself entitled, after the lapse of four months, to put this question to the noble lord, whether it is his intention to bring forward any measure with respect to Irish tithes, and whether it will involve the principle contained in these resolutions? Having received an answer from the noble lord, I will then proceed to the fulfilment of that duty, which, as I said before, is not very familiar to me, but which the answer of the noble lord will certainly impose on me.”

Lord John Russell, having explained that the delay was occasioned by the length of time necessarily devoted to the consideration and discussion of the new poor law for Ireland, thus candidly replied to Sir Robert Peel’s question:

"With respect to the question of Irish tithes, it stands in this very peculiar situation—that it has now been, during four years, under the consideration of parliament. In the year 1834 a bill was sent from this House, and was rejected by the House of Lords. In the year 1835 a bill was sent from this House, and was so altered in its principal provisions, that it was not proceeded with in the House of Lords. In the year 1836 a bill for the same purpose was framed, and having been curtailed of a great number of provisions—more than half—by the House of Lords, this House rejected the amendments, and in consequence no legislative measure on the subject was passed. In the year 1837 another measure was introduced, and in an early stage of that bill my noble friend the member for North Lancashire (Lord Stanley) declared, that unless the House agreed with him in altering certain provisions of the bill, he would oppose it on the third reading. I consider that declaration as signifying that they who took the same view as he did of this measure in the House of Lords would be disposed to oppose and reject this bill.

"Now, sir, I am quite ready to declare, that I do not think it wise, whether with reference to the interests of legislation or to the respect due to the different branches of the legislature, or to the interests of the parties concerned, of those who describe themselves as the exclusive representatives of the Church of Ireland, as well as of those who are the supporters of the measure—that this fruitless contest should be carried on by both Houses of Parliament. Therefore it will be the anxious wish of her Majesty's government, in proposing a measure relative to tithes during the present year, to submit it on a ground altogether new. Whether that ground will be more satisfactory or not, I will not say; but I hope it will be considered, so that it may form the basis of an adjustment which will prevent a legislative measure being

counteracted by the views entertained in this and in the other House of Parliament with regard to this exciting subject. I think, also, it is the duty of her Majesty's government, in bringing forward the question again, after all that has taken place concerning it, that, as far as may be in their power, they should propose a comprehensive measure—and one which, if carried, will give that, without which I consider that no measure can be comprehensive and final; viz., on the one hand, security to the Irish Church; and, on the other, satisfaction to the people of Ireland. It is with these views I mean to give notice, that on the twentieth of April this question will be introduced to the House; and I have also to state, that the nature of the measure I have to propose is such that it will not be possible to introduce it by the same kind of general resolution by which we introduced the measure of former years, but it will be necessary, first, to take the sense of the House on various resolutions, as the ground-work of the measure. I think it therefore my duty, now, to announce what those resolutions will be; I consider it my duty to state them, that the House may have a general view of the nature of the bill it is intended to propose. At the same time that I declare it to be the anxious wish of her Majesty's government to come to a settlement of this question, I must say, that I do conceive there is at present in Ireland, on the part of those who in former years have opposed its settlement, a great and growing anxiety to see it set at rest; and I do think that it will be for the advantage, not only of that party, but of parliament, and also of the people of Ireland, that the question should be finally disposed of."

He then read the resolutions which he intended to propose as the basis of his future bill, and which, in effect, converted the tithe-compositions into rent-charges.

Sir Robert Peel then said, "I will, in the first place, thank

the noble lord for the frank declaration he has made of the intentions of her Majesty's government, and also for the proof he has afforded, that the question I asked was the natural course for me to take, inasmuch as, without any previous concert with me, he was prepared to give me an answer to that question. The noble lord has exempted me from the necessity of answering his question; yet, as far as in my own power lies, I will do so. The question I asked was, whether or not, on his moving that the House resolve itself into committee on the Municipal Corporations bill, the particular motion made in the two preceding years, 'that the bill be separated,' will be renewed? I will first observe, that I think there might be some force in the noble lord's argument, that it is desirable to proceed with one measure at a time, if the noble lord had steadily adhered to that principle himself: but he did not content himself with bringing forward the Poor Law Relief bill; in introducing that measure, he did not withhold his intentions with respect to the Municipal Corporations bill. On the contrary, it will be recollect ed, that to resolve some doubts, and relieve some anxiety on the part of his friends, he accompanied the Poor Law bill with the measure respecting the municipal corporations. On that ground, then, I think we have a right to claim to be placed on a similar footing as regards the measure relating to Irish tithes. Of course the noble lord will not understand me to imply any opinion as to these resolutions by any observations that I may now make. I fully participate in that wish, which was expressed by a noble friend of mine in the other House, at the close of the last session. He said, 'he wished it might be found possible for parliament to come to some final, satisfactory settlement of this question.' There is a prospect of such a settlement, I trust, with respect to the Irish Poor Law bill. I, for one, wish it may be possible to come to a settlement with respect to the Irish Corporations

bill, and the bill relating to the Irish Church ; but I feel myself bound to say, what, indeed, I always have said on this question, that security for the Irish Church must be an essential condition of any such settlement. This was the opinion I expressed on the third reading of the Municipal Corporations bill. I trust the noble lord will himself see that it is desirable the committee on the Irish Municipal bill should be postponed until the sense of the House has been pronounced on the resolutions."

Many, at this time, believed that the amicable arrangements thus formed were the preliminaries of a coalition, a measure which was fast becoming a national necessity. Lord Melbourne's ministry had not the political strength adequate to the efficient government of the country, and Sir Robert Peel could not form a cabinet which could reasonably be expected to last for twelve months. The Irish questions having been compromised, there was really no great principle at issue between the parties ; the contest had ceased to be one of measures, and was merely one of men. The Queen, in common with the great majority of the nation, wished much to have her ministry strengthened by the financial talents of Sir Robert Peel, and the administrative abilities of some other members of the opposition ; and Lord Melbourne would not have been unwilling to resign his office as premier, so as to allow a mixed ministry to be constructed, under a neutral chief. Public opinion pointed to Earl Spencer, the Lord Althorp of Earl Grey's administration, as the statesman most likely to preside efficiently over a coalition cabinet ; but all such expectations were disappointed by a manifestation of Conservative strength and temper in the month of May.

Three hundred and thirteen members of the House of Commons united to give Sir Robert Peel a public dinner at Merchant Tailor's Hall, and three hundred of them were

actually present at the entertainment. This was a very extraordinary display of Conservative strength, for, in the first reformed parliament, the party could scarcely muster more than a hundred members. It was chiefly to Peel's admirable tactics and parliamentary skill that this marvellous increase of strength should be attributed, and the honour paid to him as leader was justly his due. A second object of the banquet was to cement the alliance which had been formed between Sir Robert Peel and Lord Stanley's party. This, indeed, was its most important result ; Peel, once assured of the support of Lord Stanley and Sir James Graham, and resolved to have them for his colleagues, felt more than ever a distaste for a coalition with the Whigs. He had the materials for a strong cabinet, and a reasonable prospect of obtaining a working majority in the next parliament. Under these circumstances the banquet might be regarded as a new declaration of war against the Whig ministry.

The speech delivered by Sir Robert on this occasion, is entitled to attention, as containing a luminous exposition of his policy in opposition. "My object," said he, "for some years past, has been to lay the foundations of a great party, which, existing in the House of Commons, and deriving its strength from the popular will, should diminish the risk and deaden the shock of collisions between the two deliberative branches of the legislature."

Having dwelt upon the peril to which the reform agitation had exposed the institutions of the country—having pronounced a panegyric upon the Duke of Wellington, "that man who is not without ambition, but without its alloys"—and having adverted to the accession of Lord Stanley and Sir James Graham to his party, as a "union, not the result of conferences, not the offspring of negotiations, but originally brought about by the force of circum-

stances, and afterwards cemented by mutual co-operation, by reciprocal confidence and respect ;” the right honourable baronet continued in the following terms :—“ Thus has this party been brought into existence, and we have this day fresh evidence of the strength it has acquired. It has been submitted twice to the test of public opinion. Twice has a dissolution taken place under circumstances calculated to determine whether this party has or has not the public confidence. One dissolution took place when it was in power, the other when power was in the hands of its opponents. On the first dissolution, in 1835, when I was at the head of the government of the country, the Conservative numbers were suddenly swollen from about 150 to more than double that number. I believe we divided on the nomination of speaker, 306 members. But it was then said—‘ You owe success to the possession of power : wait till another dissolution takes place—wait till your opponents exercise those functions of government which you discharged when parliament was assembled in 1835, and be prepared for a reduction in your numbers more rapid and striking than their increase.’ Well, to that second test we have at length been submitted. The dissolution took place in the course of the last year, with every circumstance calculated to be favourable to those in power. There was the accession of a youthful and beloved Queen. There was one universal feeling of personal loyalty and attachment towards the sovereign ascending the throne, with everything to prepossess in her favour. There was a lavish use of her Majesty’s name for the purpose of influencing the elections.

“ There was a curious coincidence—a happy, a fortunate one, for the government—of despatches approving of the conduct of public officers printed and circulated on the eve of a general election. There was no fastidious delicacy in the choice of candidates ; for the hustings of Westminster

exhibited a secretary of state voting in favour of one who had defended insurrection in Canada, and warmly advocated the cause of the Canadian revolt; yet, notwithstanding this combination of favourable circumstances—the accession of her Majesty—the prodigal use of her name—the absence of all squeamish scruples in the selection of candidates—still the result of the general election exhibited our numbers unbroken; for, as we voted 306, having had all the advantages of dissolution during the tenure of government, the names attached to the invitation of this day, comprising 313 members of the House of Commons, will, I think, sufficiently demonstrate that, notwithstanding the adverse predictions to the contrary, the public confidence has not permitted our numbers to be reduced in consequence of the second dissolution.” The right honourable baronet then entered upon a sort of apology for the extreme forbearance which had distinguished his course of opposition to the government. “The possession of strength—the demonstration of power,” said he, “naturally brings with it some slight inconvenience. There is impatience in some quarters, that, seeing the strength we possess, it is not called into more frequent action... But we must bear in mind that the particular course which an opposition should take, must partly depend upon the principles they maintain. Our more impatient friends in the country must recollect, that our very name almost implies a contradiction; we are a Conservative opposition, we adopt the principles which used to be said to prevail in an administration; we not only adopt the principles of a government, but we perform many of its functions; and it must be borne in mind that we cannot, in conformity with our opinions, take that latitude of action which might befit an opposition acting on precisely contrary principles.

“An opposition which professed to think the ancient

Institutions of this country a grievance, which considered English society a mass of abuse, has a double ground of opposition against a government; it has first the ground of personal dissatisfaction with the course taken by government, ensuring and disapproving of the acts of government, together with no indisposition to inflame popular discontent against the institutions of the country. But we must bear in mind that our duty prescribed to us by our principles is, to maintain the ancient institutions of the land. We have no desire to exalt the authority of the House of Commons above the prerogative of the crown; we have no design to undermine the privileges of the House of Lords; on the contrary, it is our duty to defend them. The field of opposition occupied by those who seek to reduce and cripple our establishments is denied to us, because we wish to see the naval and military establishments of the country maintained in proper vigour and efficiency. It is not for us to inflame popular discontent by the exaggeration of public abuses. Nor can we lend the crown our arm, to shake or curtail the liberties of the people. And, therefore, in estimating the course we have adopted, those who feel some impatience with our apparent indifference and passiveness, should always recollect that the principles maintained by an opposition, do impose some practical restraint on the conduct they must pursue.

"I said," continued Sir Robert, "that we maintain the principles and perform some of the functions of a government. I will prove this to be the case, that the position of the administration and government is inverted—that we hold the principles generally said to belong to government, repudiating those which are powerful instruments when wielded by opposition. Now I want to convince you that we have also been exercising some of the practical functions of a government, so far as the legislature is concerned. I will

select three main questions, without going through the great number of divisions in which, without the aid of the Conservative party, her Majesty's government must frequently have had to lament the smallness of their numbers, in competition with their Radical allies. I will take three questions—one connected with the religious establishments of the country; another connected with an important branch of domestic industry and internal commerce; and the third connected with the foundations of civil government, and the maintenance of the constitution of the House of Commons. The first question to which I refer, merely as a specimen—for there are hundreds of others—the first I select, is the motion in the year 1837, for excluding the bishops from the House of Lords—‘for relieving them,’ I believe it was called, ‘from the performance of their legislative duties in parliament.’

“That motion was manfully resisted, as far as speeches went, by her Majesty's ministers; it was resisted also by ourselves; but coming to the division, the ayes in favour of excluding the bishops were 92, the noes 197; the adherents of the government mustering only 50, whilst the Conservatives numbered 147. This is the first proof I give that I am not over-stating our strength and influence, when I say that we do execute some of the important functions of government. The second question involved the repeal of the corn-laws. On that occasion (in 1838) the ayes were 95, the noes 300; but 226 of the 300 were Conservatives, the Whigs only mustering 74, being in fact in a minority of 21.

“The last question to which I would refer, also, in the present session, is the vote by ballot. Don't let it be said that I am overrating the importance of that question. The vote by ballot was declared, by the minister of the crown in the House of Commons, to be not only important in itself, but as involving mighty changes in the representative constitution of this country. It was resisted on that ground,

not merely on the abstract objection to the ballot, but because it was interwoven necessarily with other and more important consequences. There voted on that occasion—for the ballot 198, against it 315 ; 254 being Conservatives, and only 61, composed of those who, acknowledging the minister as their leader, supported him in the objections he had taken to the adoption of that measure.” Sir Robert then proceeded as follows : “ I ask those friends who are impatient for more decisive action, to remember the steps by which our power has been daily advancing. I call upon them to remember that it has been by moderation, by prudence, by an undeviating adherence to our principles, that we have attained our present position. This I advise, that on every occasion, be the consequence what it may, we should resist the acts of the government when we believe them to be injurious, and avoid no fitting opportunity of enforcing the principles we maintain ; that for the purpose of averting any change in the government, we should, on no account, abate in the slightest degree one of those principles which we consider essential to the security of our institutions in church and state ; but I do hope we shall never be betrayed, for the sake of any temporary advantage, into a union with those from whose principles we wholly disagree. I also hope that we shall never adopt the advice which we sometimes receive from ardent friends and professed admirers—namely, to abandon altogether our duty in the House of Commons, for the purpose of creating embarrassment, by leaving the government to fight it out by themselves. My firm belief is, that by steadily performing our legislative functions, by attending to our duty, by censuring ministers, or attempting to censure them, when censure may be required, on all occasions by enforcing our principles, by amending their measures when they require amendment, though, at the same time, we should rescue them from temporary embarrassment, yet

we shall thereby be establishing new claims on the public approbation."

The moderation of tone for which this speech is remarkable, seems to arise more from a consciousness of strength, than from any excess of forbearance towards political adversaries. Similar discretion, however, was not displayed by all the speakers; a great deal of unnecessary vituperation was lavished on O'Connell, and there were some intemperate sallies vented against the Irish and the Catholic religion, which tended to foster dangerous national prejudices at both sides of St. George's Channel. Perhaps, also, a little too much was said about the established church, and an alarm thus given to the Dissenters, many of whom otherwise would not have been indisposed to support Sir Robert Peel as a better man of business than his rivals.

Lord Stanley, in the course of the evening, delivered a very eloquent, powerful, and telling speech, in which he declared his adhesion to Sir Robert Peel, and his future alliance with the Conservatives. "The alliance," he said, "was founded on the strongest motives which could act on private feeling, or influence public conduct—it was founded on a sense of common danger, on the conviction of a common interest." Every one who read the proceedings was convinced that the banquet was preliminary to a great political effort for the removal of the Whigs from office; it was industriously proclaimed, that the public opinion of the country had turned against them; and that a hostile vote, condemnatory of some of their measures, would be ratified by the verdict of the nation. When such feelings prevailed, it was evident that the attempt would not be long delayed.

Sir Thomas Acland was chosen, to declare anew a Conservative war against the Whigs. When Lord John Russell brought forward his motion for settling the Irish tithe-question, Sir Thomas moved that the celebrated resolutions,

embodying the Irish appropriation clause, should be formally reseinded. Lord John Russell severely reprobated this course as a breach of implied faith. He dwelt very strongly on the circumstances of the arrangement into whieh he had publicly entered with Sir Robert Peel on the floor of the House of Commons, and in the face of the country; in consequence of which ministers had postponed the Irish Municipal bill, and then, rising into a tone of indignant inveetive, thus continued:—

“ Many Irish members told me that I was wrong in postponing a measure whieh I had brought forward in previous sessions of parliament, and whieh was justly popular in Ireland, for the sake of a measure whiel must nees-sarily be attended by many diffieulties, and upon whieh the popularity of the ministry in Ireland would be risked, and might be lost. Therefore, they urged upon me, and in the strongest manner, not only the propriety, but the neessesity, of bringing forward the Irish Municipal Corporations bill prior to the introduction of the measure for the establishment of a system of poor laws in Ireland. What was the answer? ‘I will do no such thing; I will not say that I have not acted in the most conciliatory manner with respect to the propositions to be made to the other House of Parliament; I will not say that I will carry forward the Irish Municipal Corporations bill merely for the sake of obtaining a party advantage.’ Our opponents have taken great advantage of this conciliation.

“ With respect to the Municipal Corporations bill, when the right honourable gentleman asked me whether I would not postpone going into the committee upon that bill till after the tithe-question was considered, I again agreed to do so. This was a further proposition to whieh I assented, and I agreed to bring on the tithe-question before it. If the honourable baronet, who is this night about to bring forward

a motion for rescinding the resolutions of 1835, had, as he might have done, given notice of that motion at an early period of the session, instead of doing so only four days ago, I should not have deferred the Irish Municipal Corporations bill. He, therefore, has all the advantage to be derived from my conduct, and he has all the advantage of any unpopularity we might have suffered from urging forward other measures, and from delaying the Municipal Corporations bill. The only advantage I have, is the advantage I shall derive for my future guidance from the past conduct of my opponents—which is, that whenever they make professions, I shall consider those professions as snares; that whenever they make declarations, I shall consider those declarations as stratagems, and intended to deceive.”

Sir Robert Peel took shelter under the violence of O’Connell. He insisted that the principle of appropriation should be formally abandoned, and taunted the ministers with want of firmness either to maintain or retract the proposition which had placed them in office. He retorted the charge of insincerity and deception in the following terms:—

“ I say that it was perfectly open to the noble lord to have avoided this discussion. This I say, on my own part, that if the noble lord had held, this session, the language he held last session—if he had come forward and said, ‘ We will now attempt the settlement of this great question of Irish tithes, in which Irish conflicts arise—we will propose a measure, and a reasonable measure, with respect to Irish tithes, and we will ask you to consent to an Irish Corporation bill founded on the principle of popular elections;’ and if the noble lord had added that he would abandon the resolution of 1835—if the noble lord had declared he would not shrink from the unpopularity of that course—if he had proposed a settlement on this footing, and spoken thus—‘ I cannot guarantee that the arrangement shall be perfect and final

against future attacks ; but I will pledge myself to use the full weight and influence of all my authority with the government to make it final, and to repudiate the principle of the resolution of 1835'—I do not believe that the noble lord, in that case, would have found, now, a great minority against him, to insist upon reseinding the resolutions. But what course does the noble lord take ? Does he take the manly course of declaring that he will not retain the resolution of appropriation ? Quite the reverse. The noble lord has taken a course, with respect both to his proposed Tithe bill and the nature of his resolution, the most calculated to exite suspicion and alarm. The noble lord made no speech, in laying his resolutions upon the table of the House, in explanation of his motives, but he permitted the resolutions to go to Ireland without any explanatory statement. And what were the resolutions ? I read the resolutions over and over again, and I now doubt whether they contain the principle of appropriation or not ! I am inclined to believe, that they do eontain the principle of appropriation. Am I singular in that opinion ? What is the language of the noble lord's own supporters ? What said the member for Wiltshire ? He said that he had read the resolutions over and over again—he had devoted whole days to them—but he could not make out what they really did intend to declare ; and that it was not till last night that he discovered that they really did not contain any sort of principle like appropriation ; but, be it observed, this was not till after the speech of the noble lord opposite (Lord John Russell.) The noble lord the Secretary of State for the Home Department —the mover of the resolutions—made a speech of one hour and a half's duration, without saying one word, from beginning to end of it, as to whether the principle of appropriation was contained in them or not. He left us more bewildered at the conelusion of his speech than at the beginning.

I confess that I myself came down here prepared to hear something on that subject. I must say, that I never before knew an instance of a man, holding the situation of Secretary of State, and leader of the House of Commons—I never knew any man, who, being a minister of the crown, and meaning to bring on a matter of this kind—did not previously discuss and explain any principle which was to be the foundation of the whole measure he was to submit to parliament, such as the appropriation clause was in the case of the noble lord's resolutions. I never knew a case before in which, where a mighty question was proposed to be settled, nothing was previously opened to us as to what was meant to be the foundation of its settlement. It was not till the end of the debate, last night, that the noble lord the Secretary for Ireland told us that he believed the appropriation principle was not included in the resolutions. What said the honourable member for Sheffield (Mr. Ward,) than whom, on the wording of resolutions, no man in the House is a higher authority? Few men have studied these questions more accurately. He has been the mover of resolutions of his own, and is a good judge of what resolutions are intended to be. He does not speak theoretically only; he knows what the frame of a resolution ought to be, and can speak to their vagueness or other properties. With all the honourable member's experience of resolutions, what said this consummate judge of such matters, of these resolutions of the noble lord? He said that, on reading the resolutions, his first impression was, that they were vague and ambiguous; but, on reading them again, he said, 'he thought he discovered in them the germ of appropriation.' This was the construction that honourable gentleman put upon them. These were his own phrases. What course does the noble lord ask us to pursue? I will not say whether there is any 'stratagem' or 'trick' in this case; I have no right to impute motives; but

this I will say, that never was a proposal made so calculated, though perhaps not intended, to entrap us into difficulties ; for he asks us to go into committee upon those resolutions, without first stating what is his proposition respecting appropriation.”

Sir Thomas Aeland’s motion was negative by the narrow majority of nineteen—the numbers being 298 for, and 317 against. This struggle was followed by a renewal of party warfare on the bill for the reform of Irish Corporations. After the number of towns in which corporations were to be constructed on a new basis had been amicably arranged, parties divided on the amount of rating necessary as a qualification for the municipal franchise. The ministerial plan was sanctioned by a majority of the House of Commons, and that of their opponents of course introduced as an amendment in the House of Lords. A conference took place between the two Houses, but neither party was inclined to recede, and the bill was ultimately dropped. This was a serious error on the part of the Conservatives ; having once brought themselves to concede the great principle of granting popular corporations to the Irish towns, it was paltry to take their stand on the differences of a pound or two in the amount of the qualification. Timely and dignified concession would have allayed much of the irritation felt by the Irish people, and would have gone far to prevent the success of O’Connell in organizing, as he soon did, a new and most formidable agitation.

The ceremonial of the Queen’s coronation very slightly interrupted the business of this laborious session. Through the whole of it, Sir Robert Peel took a most prominent part ; indeed, in the debate on the ballot, Mr. Grote appealed to him personally to give his opinion, as an expectant minister. The Whigs lost ground in the House and in the country by abandoning the appropriation clause ; several also of their

parliamentary friends were alienated by the support which Mr. Villiers' motion for a Repeal of the Corn Laws received from some members of the cabinet. They saw that a serious struggle for Free Trade was approaching, and those most interested in maintaining the system of protection, the country gentlemen, began to be alarmed at the respect which the Whigs evinced for the principles of economic science. So lively were the apprehensions of the sensitive landlords and squires on this subject, that they rejected Colonel Seale's bill for permitting corn to be ground in bond even for purposes of exportation.

Nothing, however, was more injurious to the ministers than the unpopularity of the New Poor Law. The winter of 1837-8 had been a season of uncommon misery; its severity was aggravated by the high price of corn, and by the marked depression of the manufacturing and trading interests. In the autumn of the year a very uneasy spirit began to manifest itself among the working-classes in the manufacturing districts. Immense meetings were convened in various quarters, and the language of those who addressed the populace was most alarming and inflammatory. A document, called "the People's Charter," was framed and put in circulation, and those who adopted its extravagant principles assumed the name of Chartists. Their violence led many of the more timid Reformers to wish for the formation of a strong Conservative cabinet; and it was understood that several even of the stanchest Whigs were disposed to acquiesce in the advent of Sir Robert Peel to power.

Great pains were taken to raise an outcry against the close personal intimacy between Lord Melbourne and the Queen; a pamphlet, ascribed to Lord Brougham, neither respectful in its tone nor delicate in its taste, was published on the subject; but it produced little effect on the public mind, and it must have increased the dislike with which the

Queen was known to regard a change of ministry. This dislike was not unreasonable; the most groundless and scandalous stories respecting her character and conduct were industriously circulated; and some orators even ventured to make coarse allusions to supposed improprieties of royal conduct even in public assemblies. Consciousness of their strength had rendered the Conservatives a little too impatient of continued exclusion from office, and Sir Robert Peel had no little difficulty in restraining the impolitic eagerness of his followers and supporters.





Painted by T. arnold.

Engraved by J. H.

You faithful Servt  
Daniel O'Connell

## CHAPTER III.

## OVERTHROW OF THE MELBOURNE ADMINISTRATION.

O'CONNELL's revival of Irish agitation in the autumn of 1838, may be taken as a proof of his belief that the days of the Melbourne administration were numbered. He instituted what he called the "Precursor Society," to obtain justice for Ireland, and, in case of failure, to work with renewed earnestness for the Repeal of the Union. It must be confessed that he had some plausible excuses to urge for adopting such a course. Taking advantage of the old English prejudices against popery, the adherents and organs of the Conservative party sedulously endeavoured to aggravate, in every possible way, the apprehensions of Romanist intrigue and encroachment. Though their chiefs did not openly join in this course, they secretly connived at it; and they were even so imprudent as not to remonstrate against the attempts to create a national prejudice against Ireland in England, though repeatedly warned that such a course was engendering a bitter hatred of England in Ireland. O'Connell was keenly sensitive to these attacks on his religion and his country; but he also felt that he had not received, generally, from the people of England, that sympathy and support to which he deemed himself entitled for his eminent services in the cause of reform. He was aware that his connection with the ministry was one of the chief causes of their unpopularity in England; he felt himself unjustly proscribed, and under such circumstances great allowances must be made for the extent of his resentment.

The concentrated movement of all the manufacturing interests against the existing system of the Corn Laws, was a fresh source of embarrassment to the government. Many of the ministers were themselves as thoroughly convinced of the injustice and impolicy of protection as any of the leaders of the Anti-Corn-Law League ; but they dreaded the consequences of a collision with the landed interest, which was predominant in the House of Commons, and they shrank from pledging themselves to any definite course on the subject. In the debate on the address at the opening of the session of 1839, Lord Melbourne referred to this difficult topic with a cautious hesitation, very unlike the usual candour of his ministerial speeches :—“The Corn Laws,” he said, “have been, ever since the formation of the present government, an entirely open question, a question on which all the various members of the administration have formed distinct opinions. Unquestionably, my lords, I believe that the majority of these gentlemen are favourable to a change in the present system. I am not willing to go into any debate on the Corn Laws, on the present occasion ; I wish to avoid it, but I have no reluctance to state my individual opinion on the subject—that opinion which I have on a former occasion expressed, and to which I now distinctly adhere—is, that though I am not prepared to pledge or bind myself to the maintenance of the present system, as the best possible, I am not, at the same time, prepared, either as a member of parliament or of the government, to pledge myself, from any information which I have, to an alteration of the law as it stands.”

This declaration displeased both the supporters and the opponents of the Corn Laws. The landed-gentry turned against a ministry, the majority of which were hostile to their beloved system of protection ; while the manufacturers were deeply offended by the premier’s refusal to make any

alteration in laws which had proved most injurious to trade and commerce. The difficulties of the manufacturers were increased by the perverse conduct of the Chartists; the Corn Laws pressed more heavily on the labouring classes than on any other portion of the community; but at almost every meeting held to propose petitions for their repeal, the Chartist leaders proposed amendments, to the effect that the "People's Charter" was the only remedy for the social evils of the community. The object of these leaders was to create a breach between the class of employers and the class of operatives; and in this most mischievous effort they were, for a time, tolerably successful.

Another source of embarrassment to the government, was the war in Afghanistan. The Shah of Persia, instigated, it is said, by Russian intrigues, resolved to establish a political ascendancy in Afghanistan, which had long been divided between the brothers of the Baurikzye family, a nominal sovereignty being recognized in the person of Dost Mohammed Khan, the chief of Cabool. In spite of the remonstrances of the English envoy, the Shah of Persia advanced to Herat, and besieged that city. He was so valiantly resisted, that he was obliged to abandon the enterprise; but through the interference of a Russian agent, he was enabled to conclude a treaty with the chief of Cabool, providing for the establishment of their joint supremacy over the countries west of the Indus. To counteract these intrigues, which seemed obviously intended to open to a Russian army a passage through Central Asia to the frontiers of British India, a mission, at the head of which was Captain Alexander Burnes was sent to Cabool, ostensibly for the purpose of negotiating a commercial treaty. The chief difficulty which the mission had to encounter, arose from our being already in strict alliance with Runjeet Singh, malia-rajah of the Sikhs, between whom and the Affghans there had long been the most bitter feud. While our envoy was at Cabool, the Affghans suddenly

renewed their war against the Sikhs: an offer of English mediation was made; it was accepted by Runjeet Singh, but was most peremptorily rejected by Dost Mohammed Khan. Under these circumstances, it was resolved that Shah Soojah, the exiled monarch of Affghanistan, who had been for many years dependent on English bounty for his support, should be restored to the throne of his ancestors, and an army was assembled on the English frontiers for the purpose.

The principle, that “restorations are the worst of revolutions” had passed into an aphorism, and therefore the prudence of restoring a monarch, who had been so long de-throned, was very generally questioned; it was further objected, that if the object of the war was to check Russian intrigue, that the check ought to be applied directly to Russia, and not indirectly to Affghanistan. When remonstrances were made to the cabinet of St. Petersburg, the Russian government not only disavowed these intrigues, but recalled the agent to whom they had been attributed. For these reasons the English public did not acquiesce, generally, in the expediency or propriety of the Affghan war; and whatever popularity the expedition acquired by its early successes was more than counterbalanced by its subsequent disasters and reverses. The Whigs were just strong enough to remain in power, but they were not sufficiently strong to conduct the government effectively, and in such a case it seems hardly reconcilable with prudence that they should have encountered the hazards of a distant and doubtful war.

Viewing all these circumstances, it is clear that the ministers were weaker at the commencement of the session of 1839, than at the close of the session of 1838. Their first difficulty was the question of the Corn Laws; and their perplexity on this subject was not a little increased by the injudicious means which one of their warmest partisans adopted to give them support. Anxious to conciliate the manufacturing interests, the ministers selected, as seconder

of the address at the opening of the session, Mr. George William Wood, chairman of the Manchester Chamber of Commerce. He was a gentleman eminent in the manufacturing interest, and high in the confidence of that body; as such it was pre-eminently his mission in parliament, to insist upon the repeal of the Corn Laws; but, on the other hand, it was no less incumbent on him, as seconder of the address, to make as favourable a representation as possible of the general prosperity of the country. But the depressed state of the manufacturing interest was, at that time, the most effective of all the arguments on which the advocates for a free trade in corn relied. Mr. Wood, however, apparently forgot his anti-corn-law connections, in his anxiety to do himself credit by his speech on the address; he came down to the House, armed with tables and calculations, to show that the manufactures of the country were in a healthy and improving state. He delivered a very able and eloquent panegyric on the state of the country; and then, at the close of his speech, thus referred to the agitation which had commenced for obtaining a repeal of the Corn Laws. "There is," said he, "one peculiarity in the proceedings which have taken place throughout the country, with reference to this subject, which it behoves the House well to consider. We should recollect that the excitement which has now sprung up, is not an excitement of a temporary nature, arising from a casual advance in the price of bread—it is not a cry proceeding from those who suffer from famine—it is the demand of the intelligent middle classes, of the merchants, manufacturers, and traders of Great Britain. It is the voice of those who have great intelligence, integrity, and patriotic feelings—of those who have a stake in the country, and who are as anxious for the prosperity of agriculture, as for that of the manufactures by which they live. It is not likely, then, that, even if favourable seasons should again reduce the price

of bread, the question which is now started can be laid aside. Twenty years of peace have given a spring to the industry, and encouragement to the commerce, of all nations. It has been seen how great this country has become through its commerce. It no doubt has filled the minds of the people of other countries with wonder and astonishment, to see how we have borne up against that long suspension of our commercial intercourse which the war occasioned. Their statesmen must naturally have been anxious to procure for their people and fellow-subjects an opportunity of imitating our successful career. And this should not be a matter of regret to us; for it is natural that other countries should employ their resources in the occupation of industry, and in the accumulation of wealth. So far from looking on this as an evil, I think it is a great good, and offers the surest means to preserve peace, the blessings of which we have so long enjoyed. But the encouragement which these countries have given to such of their people as were engaged in manufactures, is now beginning to produce its important effects, by the establishment of a successful competition with this country, not only in the nations of the old world, but in the remoter markets, where our exports are seriously interfered with. A deep alarm is entertained by our manufacturers, that our prosperity, as a manufacturing country, will thus be seriously endangered. If such apprehensions are well founded, the manufacturers must feel that there are no means of amending their condition, but by an attempt which, even if it were really practicable, all of us must deplore—to depress the wages of labour. Whether that alternative shall become necessary or not, it is the duty of the legislature, in my opinion, to place the manufacturers of this country on a footing as nearly equal as possible to that on which the manufacturers of other countries stand."

A convention of delegates from the manufacturing dis-

tricts was, at this time, assembled in London, to urge upon parliament and government the absolute necessity of an immediate repeal of the Corn Laws. Mr. Wood was the natural exponent of their opinions, and hence his speech was likely to prove most injurious to their cause. The ground of complaint was swept from under them, if it could be established, that under the Corn Laws, the commerce and manufactures of the country not only flourished, but were in a state of progressive prosperity. Sir Robert Peel, who was at this time regarded as the chosen champion of the landed interest, made a most effective use of Mr. Wood's unguarded statements. Having briefly referred to the agitation of the question out-of-doors, he said—

"Sir, with my views upon the subject of Corn Laws, I have to thank the honourable member, considering his high authority, as Chairman of the Chamber of Commerce at Manchester, and with his knowledge of the facts, for the extreme clearness with which he stated them. I have to thank him for a brief speech, but at the same time for one of the ablest and most conclusive speeches, in defence of the existing system, which I have ever had the good fortune to hear. My honourable friends near me know, that when, in their exultation at the turn the honourable gentleman's argument was taking, they called upon me to cheer, I declined to do so until I should hear the close of the honourable gentleman's speech. Knowing, as I did, the honourable gentleman's previously expressed opinions upon this subject, I could not suppose but that he would endeavour to shake that sort of confirmation to our views, who sit on this side of the House, which the facts and statements so well adduced by the honourable gentleman were calculated in the first instance to establish. I could not suppose that the honourable gentleman would conclude without endeavouring to demolish his own premises, and those inferences which he

himself had drawn ; and I was therefore never more relieved in all my life, than when the honourable gentleman sat down, without thus turning upon them ; for I never yet heard any speech, which, going through the country with the authority, not only of the seconder of the Address of the House of Commons, but of the Chairman of the Manchester Chamber of Commerce, was so calculated to convince those who have hitherto been unfriendly to the existing system of our Corn Laws, and to remove the apprehensions of persons who might heretofore have been the advocates of a change in it.”

The indignation of the manufacturers who sought the repeal of the Corn Laws, against Mr. Wood, was unbounded. He was at once removed from the Chairmanship of the Manchester Chamber, and large subscriptions were raised to support an effective agitation against the entire system of protection. The Free Traders were peculiarly fortunate in their choice of leaders ; the movement in the country was chiefly guided by Mr. Cobden, a gentleman of great eminence as a manufacturer, and locally known as a cautious and sound politician. In the course of the agitation he displayed natural powers of which probably he had not himself been previously conscious ; his speeches were to a great extent lectures on economic science, and they are unrivalled specimens of the art of expounding great truths, and elucidating their practical application.

The Hon. Charles Pelham Villiers was the parliamentary leader of the Free Traders. Connected by birth with the highest branches of the aristocracy, and having no connection whatever with trade or commerce, it was evident to all that his hostility to the Corn Laws had no relation whatever to his personal or political interests. These, indeed, lay all in the very opposite direction. But trained in the best school of economic science, gifted by nature with a most acute per-



THE HONBLE CHARLES PELHAM VILLIERS, M.P.

C.P. Villiers



ception of its philosophic truths, and convinced by laborious investigation and impartial observation that the neglect of these truths was the greatest source of loss and misery to the country, he had from his first entrance into public life denounced the iniquity and impolicy of the Corn Laws, and had been a zealous labourer in the cause of Free Trade when the manufacturers were dull and apathetic on the subject. They came to him—he did not go to them; they chose him not as a leader, but followed him as a leader already tried and tested in the field. The only difference between his position in 1839, and that which he had held when proposing the repeal of the Corn Laws on former occasions, was that he had now the manufacturers behind him, banded together by a deep consciousness of the importance of the question, and a thorough conviction that the existing system was injurious to their most vital interests. To this change of feeling on the subject Mr. Villiers directed attention when he proposed, on the 19th of February, that evidence to prove the injurious effects of the Corn Laws should be received at the bar of the House:—

“ I can unaffectedly assure the House,” he said, “ that nothing would have induced me to have engaged in this task, had I not been assured, by those whose interests are involved in the question, that it depends simply on a statement of its merits, and not upon the ability or talent of any advocate. Sir, those parties have approached this House in the spirit of men of business; and I trust that this discussion may be conducted in the spirit in which the petitioners come before it. Certainly, nothing that I shall say, nothing that I shall address to the House, shall afford any one an example of a deviation from that course. In accordance with the notice I have given, I have now to move that certain persons who have petitioned this House be allowed to prove the allegations of their petition at the bar of this House. Who these

persons are—what it is that they allege and are prepared to prove—and on what ground it is they have been induced to make this application—I will now, as briefly and concisely as I am able, proceed to state. These persons, then, deeply interested in the subject of the petition themselves, have been selected by their fellow-citizens and fellow-sufferers, assembled at great public meetings for the purpose, to make known to this House, by all legitimate means in their power, the specific grievance of which they complain; and they bring this complaint chiefly from those vast districts of industry in this country, where the mass of the inhabitants, depending for existence upon the employment of their labour, expect that employment as much from the people of other countries, as from their countrymen around them. The names of some places from whence these petitions proceed, will make their interests known to the House. They are as follow:—Glasgow, Leeds, Liverpool, Manchester, Nottingham, Derby, Birmingham, Wolverhampton, and the Tower Hamlets, Kendal, &c.;—places, the sum of whose population is above 2,000,000, and which will be at once recognized as the seats of the great staple manufactures of the country. And here the House will, I trust, not object to my referring for one minute with particularity to the importance of some of those interests to the country, and I will only refer to those who have the most reason to apprehend danger to themselves, from the grievance of which they complain, namely, the cotton trade, the linen trade, the woollen trade, and the hardware trade. According to the most authentic estimates, I find that, on the cotton manufacture of this country, not fewer than 1,500,000 persons depend for their support; that the amount of capital employed in it amounts to £20,000,000; that the annual value of the manufacture is about £34,000,000; and that our export of this manufacture to other countries is about two-sevenths in value, and

three-fourths in quantity. In the woollen trade, the annual value is about £27,000,000, of which about one quarter is exported; the number of persons employed is nearly 400,000, receiving in wages about £8,750,000; and consuming, of English wool, 108,000,000 lbs. The product of the linen manufacture is about £8,000,000, and wages about £3,500,000; hardware and cutlery, value about £17,000,000; people employed, 300,000: the prosperity of the latter trade depends upon the foreign demand. In all the principal districts where these manufactures are carried on, there have been large and open meetings held, for the purpose of affirming the allegations of this petition; and in nearly all has the strongest wish been manifested and expressed, that some more decided attention should be directed to them than is usually afforded by this House; and I have thought it right to describe the importance of their interests to this House, to satisfy honourable members that it is no insignificant party that is now asking attention of the legislature.

“ And now, sir, I come to what it is these parties allege, and what they pray you to be allowed to prove at your bar. And here let me ask the House to distinguish between what it is they do allege, and what it may be said they allege. They say this—that of late years they have had to observe a striking change in the character of their dealings with nations on whose custom they used to depend; that once valuable friends have become alarming rivals; and they say something more, for they say that you have done this—in plain terms—that the legislature, having denied to them the liberty of exchanging with other countries their manufactures for the article those countries have in excess, and are anxious to offer in exchange, namely, human food—have compelled those other countries to divert their resources from the production of food, in order to satisfy their own demand for manufactures. This, the petitioners say, the Corn Laws

have done, and that not only have they turned away our customers, but that, converting those customers into competitors, they have reason to apprehend that these laws will ultimately render us unequal to the struggle. The points, therefore, which these petitioners, on behalf of the great manufacturing interests of this country, have to prove, are—that there is a most active competition going on in other countries of the world; that this has been chiefly occasioned, and is now greatly favoured, by the Corn Laws; and that, should it extend in a ratio proportionate to that which it has reached already, the results will be prejudicial to the country at large, and peculiarly so to the productive or working-classes, whose condition will be either that of a serious deterioration, or destitution. They do not, in this application, ask you to repeal these laws, nor do they now ask you to say why you will not repeal them; but they say that, as these are the important consequences to them of these laws, and as the facts which prove them to be true do not fall necessarily within the notice of a majority of this House, or are admitted by them to be true, therefore they ask you to be allowed to place them beyond doubt. There is nothing, as they say, which takes their case out of the range of distinct and specific proof, and there is nothing to preclude them from completing their case within a very limited period. They have only to repeat to this House the experience which has been forced upon them, and which experience they would hope, if known to you, will have some weight in your judgment when called on to decide the general question. They do not come here to allege or detail stories of general distress; they do not come here to excite your compassion at their losses—to excite the passions of the people at their wrongs; they come here simply to apprise you of those indications of coming evils, which, by their effect upon their interests, they have been obliged to know, and which, though

they may be the first to feel, yet which can only arrive to be shared by millions of the people, and which, if heard in season, may be averted. Now, sir, I shall state what I believe to be within the possibility of proof. In the first place, I shall prove that the tariff of duties which has been imposed by different countries, in order to foster manufactures, and by which our manufactures are in some cases excluded, and in others much prejudiced, by the added price, was only imposed after repeated remonstrances by the governments of those countries against our own restrictive system, and that, for twenty years past, in the north of Europe, and before the year 1824, in America, the laws which restrict, and sometimes prohibit, the trade in food, have been the constant theme of complaint by those countries which had that article to offer us in exchange ; and that both Germany and America, where our rivals are now most prosperous, say, ‘Take our corn, and we will take your manufactures.’ This has been the basis on which they have always desired to negotiate ; and, furthermore, so averse were the people of those countries to refuse our manufactures at first, that the governments could only reconcile them to the endurance of retaliatory tariffs by representing to them the mischievousness and selfishness of our policy in refusing to take their food, assuming that they could not manufacture for themselves. The official journals of those countries teem with abuse of us on this ground.

“ For the first great step taken by our rivals in becoming manufacturing people in rivalry with ourselves, under every disadvantage which the circumstances of our neighbourhood and established superiority placed them, we must distinctly and without question refer to the Corn Laws. And all that we have lost in employment and profit, in good-will with those people, we must distinctly place at the door of those laws. But it is not in the nature of those laws to be limited

in their mischief, and it is in the operation of this system, while it deprives us of our customers and makes them our rivals, at the same time to give them an advantage in competition; for they not only have the benefit of price added in the amount of duty which they impose upon our goods, but they have also the benefit of our being obliged, in all matters in which the cost of living enters into the cost of production, to live at double the price that they are obliged to do. And it is now what your petitioners seek to show, that those people have seized the advantage which we conferred upon them; and that in all articles of manufacture into which the price of living enters into the cost of production, they are now employing themselves in competition with us. This is no general and vague statement. They are ready, here, to specify the countries where this has occurred, to describe the very articles in which it has been observed, and to verify what they allege to have been the cause of that change."

Mr. Villiers then proceeded to establish his case by a most able and lucid examination of the condition of the staple manufactures of Great Britain, particularly those of cotton, wool, and iron, and in concluding his most effective speech cited various precedents in favour of the proposed inquiry. For the first time the landlords began to believe in the possibility of their monopoly being endangered. They had previously regarded Mr. Villiers' annual motion much in the same light as Mr. Grote's annual motion on the ballot—a matter that was to give a long debate, to be negatived by a large majority, and to be laid aside for the rest of the session. But the thorough earnestness of Mr. Villiers, the unanswerable array of facts which he brought forward, and the clearness with which he traced the direct and incidental injury produced by the Corn Laws to the manufacturers, the traders, and the labouring classes, greatly abated their con-

fidencee, or rather changed it into serious alarm. The debate turned chiefly on the technical part of the motion ; Sir Robert Peel, as leader of the Protectionists, avoided any direct defence of the Corn Laws, and confined himself to showing that the proposed inquiry would be unsatisfactory and practically useless.

Although defeated by a large majority, Mr. Villiers did not lose courage ; in fact, the debate presented many features calculated to avert despondency ; and not the least marked of these was—the obvious unwillingness of the advocates of the Corn Laws to avoid discussing the question on its merits. Mr. Villiers immediately gave notice of a more direct motion on the subject, and on the 12th of March he moved that the House should resolve itself into a committee to consider the laws for regulating the importation of corn. The supporters of the monopoly were mortified and indignant ; they protested against being compelled to discuss a question of which they had already disposed ; but they felt that the nation had become interested in the struggle, and that they could not evade being put on their defencee. To their obvious annoyance and discomfiture, the debate was protracted through four successive nights, and then adjourned to a fifth ; on the fourth of these nights, Sir Robert Peel delivered the best defencee of the Corn Laws ever heard in the House of Commons. It was a speech which fixed and determined a most remarkable era in his politieal life, and from which we must, therefore, make pretty copious extracts.

Having alluded rather bitterly to the divided opinions of the Cabinet on the subjeect, he proceeded to set the speech delivered by Mr. G. W. Wood at the commencement of the session, in opposition to the statements made by the Manchester manufacturers :

“ Before these debates began, and previously to the commencement of this session, I inferred that the chief stress

would be laid upon the decaying state of commerce and manufactures. When I found that agitation was determined on, that the board of delegates had been constituted, that appeals were made to physical force, that the aristocracy and the landed proprietors of the country were denounced to public vengeance by those portions of the press which are generally the advocates of the existing government, I thought that the depressed state of commerce and of manufactures, and the impoverished condition of the mechanic and artisan would be brought prominently forward. But what has become in this debate of the depressed state of manufactures? Why have the delegates been forgotten? When the member for Kendal (Mr. G. W. Wood) stated on the first night of the session, that manufactures were recovering from depression, and that the general commerce of the country was in a sound and satisfactory state, he provoked the utmost indignation by the manly candour of his avowals. Was he right, or was he wrong, in his statements? If he was right, why has he been punished for his honesty? If he was wrong, why have not you exposed his error? The fact is, you know that he was right, and that official documents, since published, have confirmed his statements. You know there could have been no permanent advantage in his concealment of facts, which, if withheld, those documents must shortly have exhibited. The displeasure which he has incurred, the punishment with which he has been visited, prove that he deprived the advocates for repeal of the argument on which they had mainly relied, when he publicly proclaimed, with the authority belonging to his name and station, that manufactures were rapidly reviving, and that commerce was in a satisfactory condition."

He next adverted to the argument, that though exports had increased, the profits on produced and exported articles had been diminished to an alarming extent:

"If profits are so unreasonably low, how does it happen

that the number of new factories has greatly increased within the last few years, that the factory destroyed by accident is instantly replaced, and that new factories are constantly erected? The reason sometimes given, namely, that those who are already embarked in manufacturing speculations, find it necessary to extend their establishments for the purpose of increasing the scanty amount of profit, is not very satisfactory. It does not, at any rate, account for the building of new factories by new speculators. It is said, indeed, that although new factories have been built, and old ones enlarged, this has not taken place very recently; nay, more, that many of the factories so built, are at present either totally or partially closed. This was said especially in the case of Preston, I believe. Now I hold in my hand a letter from Preston, calculated to mitigate the apprehensions on this head, which former statements may have caused. This letter positively declares that only two mills, and those very small ones, have reduced the time of working; that the owner of one of these mills is a Corn Law delegate; and that the owners of both of them, finding no other persons prepared to follow their example, have wisely resolved to sail with the stream, and resume their accustomed labours."

The effect of the Corn Laws on the condition of the labourer next came under his review:—

"I consider this statement, that the condition of the labourer has been rendered worse by the operation of the Corn Law, a most important one, and I have no hesitation in saying, that unless the existence of the Corn Law can be shown to be consistent, not only with the prosperity of agriculture and the maintenance of the landlord's interest, but also with the protection and the maintenance of the general interests of the country, and especially with the improvement of the condition of the labouring class, the Corn Law is practically at an end. But let us look to those

documents which contain evidence as to the general condition of the working-classes ; and do they, I ask, show that the condition of the poor in those towns where manufactures are chiefly carried on, has been rendered worse, or their comforts curtailed ? I do not allude to those peculiar cases of individual suffering which will always be found where there are such complicated relations of society as exist in England. It will ever be the case that there will be particular instances of distress and suffering, calculated to awaken our deepest sympathy ; but the argument from individual cases of privation is not conclusive. It admits, too, of easy application to agricultural distress in case the Corn Laws were repealed, and the poor soils thrown out of cultivation. We might adduce the case of the peasant advanced in life, attached to the spot of his birth, able and willing to labour, unfit for any other than rural occupations, banished from home, and forced to seek a scanty subsistence in a manufacturing town.

“ We should look at general results, and though not altogether satisfactory, yet perhaps no better evidence as to general results can be had than the reports of the Savings’ Banks. You say that your object is, that the manufacturing class should not merely be enabled to provide themselves with the means of daily subsistence, but to lay by something for the future comfort of themselves and their families. A wise and benevolent object ! Let us see whether it is altogether frustrated.”

Having shown from elaborate returns the great increase in the deposits at the Savings’ Banks in Liverpool, Glasgow, Leicester, Birmingham, and Manchester ; he sophistically assigned the prosperity of the operatives in the latter town as the cause of the Chartist opposition to the agitation for the repeal of the Corn Laws :—

“ It must have been about the time that this report of

the Manchester Savings' Bank was in preparation, while the manager and officers of the institution were congratulating themselves on the present success of the Savings' Bank, and on the hope of its rapid extension, and were thus bearing public testimony to the improved condition of the manufacturing classes in Manchester and Salford; that in those very towns commenced the system of agitation, which has received the sanction of the President of the Board of Trade. Then it was that the delegates were appointed, and meetings organized, and lectures to the labouring classes prepared, for the purpose of stirring up impatience and indignation with the Corn Laws, as the main causes of whatever evils they were exposed to. Then it was that those organs of public intelligence which most strenuously support her Majesty's government, were denouncing the aristocracy and the landed proprietors as selfish tyrants, fattening on the labour and sufferings of the exhausted poor, and provoking (if other means should fail) the resort to physical force. True it is, the attempt at agitation has failed, not from the returning moderation and good sense of its authors, but because their allegations of manufacturing distress and decaying commerce were contradicted by the member for Kendal, and by the official returns; and, above all, because they found themselves utterly powerless to guide the tempest which they were able to raise. They soon discovered that agitation could not be restricted within the limits they would assign to it—that it could not be directed exclusively against the proprietors of land—that the confederates, on whom they relied, would turn upon their leaders and tell them, (whether truly or not I will not pretend to determine,) ' You who profess hostility to the landlords and aristocracy of the country—who impute to those classes of the community selfish motives—who attribute to them the desire to secure their own profits and to grind

the poor—we will be no parties to your agitation—we will not lend ourselves to your schemes—we know that your only object is to increase the profits of the cotton-spinner, and by lowering the price of corn, to lower at the same time the rate of wages.' I abominate as much as any man the doctrines mixed up with opposition to the delegates and their projects ; but, at the same time, it may be a salutary lesson to those who commence agitation, to find that the first to suffer by the lessons they have taught, are the agitators themselves."

It having been insisted that the costs of freight and transport gave sufficient protection to British farmers, and that there was no need to dread competition in corn, while there was every cause for alarm at the growing competition in manufactures, Sir Robert Peel thus met the double argument :—

" The agriculturists, you say, need be under no apprehension from foreign imports. The Baltic is almost the only source of supply. The total quantity of foreign wheat which can be imported with a free trade in corn will not exceed one million of quarters, and the price per quarter will be forty-five shillings. Why, if this be so, what shameful exaggerations must there have been of the pressure and evil of the present Corn Laws ? How perfectly baseless must be the anticipation that there will be a boundless demand for our manufactures in exchange for foreign corn, if the Corn Laws were repealed ? Within the last eight or nine years, we have actually imported from foreign countries not less, on an average, than 750,000 quarters of wheat per annum ; and is it credible that the regular future demand for one million of quarters, that is, 250,000 quarters in addition to the past supply, will produce these enormous benefits ? Will it again gravely be maintained that the Corn Laws impose a tax of eighteen or twenty millions on the people of

this country, when all we are to hope for from their repeal, is an addition of 250,000 quarters to our imports of foreign wheat ; the sole difference consisting in a regular, instead of a casual and occasional demand for this supply ? Is this to raise the prices on the Continent to the level of prices at home ? Is this to make a total revolution in the manufacturing industry of the Continent, and to restore our pre-eminence by the destruction of foreign competition ? Is the import of a little more wheat from the Baltic, to impede the progress in manufactures of France, Belgium, and Switzerland, not one of which countries, we are told, is to increase their demand for our commodities by the export of corn ? If Saxony can really undersell us in hosiery by 25 per cent., will so slight a cause restore the balance ? What influence will the additional import of Baltic wheat have on the United States, our most formidable competitor, so far as the manufacture of cotton is concerned ? The increase in the consumption of cotton for the purpose of manufacture since the year 1826, has been estimated at—

In France	...   ...   ...   ...   ...   ...   ...	40 per cent.
In Europe, (exclusive of France)	...   ...	100 per cent.
In the United States	...   ...   ...   ...   ...	160 per cent.
In Great Britain	...   ...   ...   ...   ...	129 per cent.

“ Can it be believed, looking at the present state or extent of our dealings in raw produce with the United States, that the import of a small additional quantity of corn will sensibly affect the relative position of the two countries, in respect to home manufacture ?

“ You taunt me with rejoicing in the successful prosecution of manufactures by other powers. I do not rejoice in it—I merely contend that it is the inevitable consequence of the return to peace, and the continuance of peace for nearly a quarter of a century. I do not participate in your surprise that a country like the United States, with the raw material

at hand, as population increases, as towns and cities multiply, and as fertile land, easily accessible, becomes more scarce, should apply herself to the production of certain articles of manufacture. Your surprise reminds me of the Birmingham manufacturer, who prophesied, on the breaking out of war with England, that the crops of the United States would be devoured by vermin, because she had been supplied from Birmingham with mouse-traps, and had not skill enough to manufacture a mouse-trap at home."

One of the most remarkable passages in his speech was that in which he advocated restrictive duties "as a provident insurance against the dangers of famine," because seven years after, when famine was imminent, he was compelled to declare that the calamity could only be averted by the total abolition of restrictive duties:—

"It will not be the hostility, it will not be the caprice of foreign nations that will withhold from us the usual supply; but the paramount duty they owe to their own people will induce them, in the moment of real pressure, to take the very step which France and other countries of Europe have actually taken within the last six months, and interdict the exportation of grain. Should that event occur, it is possible that the wealth of England may command a considerable supply, but in proportion to the deficiency at home, in proportion to the suddenness of the demand, must be our exertions. According to your statements, our chief dealings will be confined to the Baltic; Odessa and the United States are too distant to permit any regular import. We shall not then have encouraged, by our dealings with distant states in ordinary seasons, any superfluous supply, to be available in the moment of need. Should the corn-growing countries of the Baltic be visited, at the same time with ourselves, with a deficient harvest, we shall have to export bullion for the purchase of corn wherever we can find it, and thus encounter

that very risk of deranging the money-market, and suspending payments in cash, which you consider the peculiar defect of the present law. The more you increase your dependence on foreign supply, the more, as it appears to me, do you increase, in the event of severe and general pressure, the risk of a monetary derangement."

Having dealt very lightly with Mr. Villiers' proposal for total and immediate repeal, as a project on which it was not intended seriously to insist, he turned his attention to the ministerial proposition of a fixed duty, which he and the agriculturists believed to be the more probable substitute for their beloved Corn Laws.

" Her Majesty's ministers prefer a fixed duty either to the fluctuating scale or to the simple repeal of the Corn Laws. Now, every argument against protection to home-produce, such for instance as the policy of buying corn in the cheapest market, and the folly of adding to the incumbrance of the public debt another incumbrance in the shape of a tax upon corn, applies in principle with equal force to the fixed as to the fluctuating duty. The conflict between the advocates for free trade and the advocates for fixed duty will commence the very moment they have apparently triumphed over us. But what avails it to profess yourselves advocates for a fixed duty, unless you have determined on its amount? How easy it is for any noble lord or honourable member to say—' I am opposed to the total repeal of the Corn Laws—I am opposed to the present Laws—but I am in favour of a fixed duty.' What advance do we make towards a settlement of this great question, by this vague declaration? What advance can we make unless the amount of that fixed duty be stated? And yet we are called upon to go into committee in complete ignorance of the views of the advocates for fixed duty—in the hope, I suppose, that under the guidance of Mr. Bernal we shall be inspired with that sagacity which is denied to us

while the Speaker is in the chair. If her Majesty's government have made up their minds to the imposition of a fixed duty, why do they not state the amount of it to the House? Why do they not explain the principle and the calculations upon which it is to be founded? You invite us (addressing the Treasury bench) to go into committee, on the application of an honourable member to whose views you are altogether opposed. The President of the Board of Trade, who I presume to be your organ on this occasion, says, 'Let us go into committee, and we shall have so many various plans, that we cannot fail to find one which will suit us. The smallest contribution will be thankfully received.' Was it ever known on such an important question as this, one so engrossing to the public mind, so exciting to a large class of the population of the country, that a government should propose to us to go into a committee, rejecting the opinions of the member who proposes it, and withholding from us the slightest indication of the course they mean to take in that committee? I could have understood them had they said, 'This question is of paramount importance, and it must be settled; we therefore come on the authority of a united cabinet, and settle it we will.' I could have understood them if, on the other hand, they had declared, That there was no prospect of the settlement of the present question, that they looked upon continued agitation on the Corn Laws to be a great national evil, that it was their wish to calm rather than disturb the country, and that they would not therefore enter into a fishing committee, that they would not bait with delusion, in the hope of catching a Corn bill. This course also I could have understood; but the course taken by the government is inconsistent with its duty and authority; it prolongs agitation, without affording the prospect of settlement.

"No doubt a committee on the Corn Laws is a necessary

form, before any practical measure could be proceeded with. But it is a mere form. Whoever advises it should have made some advancee towards the solution of the great difficulties which environ the consideration of the question, What is the amount of fixed protecting duty to which the agriculture of this country is entitled? He must have revolved in his mind whether, on the same principle on which a protecting duty on import is imposed—there ought not to be a corresponding drawback on the export of British corn—not a bounty, but a drawback, equivalent to those special burdens upon agriculture, to countervail which the import duty would be imposed. He must well have considered, whether the indiscriminate admission of foreign corn at a fixed duty, to be determined irrevocably beforehand, might not in very productive seasons at home and abroad, pour into our markets such a glut of foreign produce, as completely to derange all agricultural speculations. Above all, he must have considered how the fixed duty is to be maintained in the seasons of deficient supply and threatened famine—whether it is to be enforced at all hazards—whether it is to be relaxed under certain circumstances, and if so, by what authority, and on what conditions it shall be relaxed, and, after relaxation, reimposed."

His peroration was peculiarly effective:—

"If her Majesty's government, on their responsibility as a government, with a distinct declaration of their principles, and a full explanation of their views, were to call upon us to reconsider the Corn-Laws, and to remove the obstacle to the importation of foreign corn, we should be placed in a different position from that in which we now stand. Even then, while we might respect their motives, and the manliness of their course, we should pause. We should tell them there were higher considerations involved, than those of mercantile profit. We should doubt the policy of making this great

country more dependent than it is on foreign supplies. Admitting that the extension of intercourse, by the reciprocation of benefits and the sense of common interests, is a great guarantee for peace, still we should not implicitly rely on its efficacy. We should remember that, within our own short experience, the insane ambition of a single man, bent upon our destruction, had, for many years, overruled all the impediments which the love of gain, or the prosecution of peaceful industry among millions of men, could offer to his reckless course. We should find, even in the present state of the world, in North America, in Spain, in the Gulf of Mexico, ample proof that the interests and the influence of commerce will not always ensure the peaceful arbitration of differences. Could you prove to us that the true principles of mercantile dealing required us to purchase corn in the cheapest market, and to withdraw the capital which has fertilized the inferior soils of this country, for the purpose of applying it to the rich but unprofitable wastes of Poland—still we should hesitate. We should remember, with pain, the cheerful and smiling prospects which were thus to be obscured. We should view with regret cultivation receding from the hill-top, which it has climbed under the influence of protection, and from which it surveys with joy the progress of successful toil. If you convince us that your most sanguine hopes would be realized—that this country would become the great workshop of the world—would blight through the cheapness of food, and the demand for foreign corn, the manufacturing industry of every other country—would present the dull succession of enormous manufacturing towns connected by railways, intersecting the abandoned tracts which it was no longer profitable to cultivate—we should not forget, amid all these presages of complete happiness, that it has been under the influence of protection to agriculture, continued for two hundred years, that the fen has been drained, the wild heath

reclaimed, the health of a whole people improved, their life prolonged, and all this not at the expense of manufacturing prosperity, but concurrently with its wonderful advancement.

"If you had called on us to abandon this protection with all the authority of a united administration, with the exhibition of superior sagacity and triumphant reasoning, we might have been deaf to your appeal ; but when, inviting us to follow you, you present nothing but distracted councils, conflicting colleagues, statements of facts not to be reconciled, and arguments leading to opposite conclusions, then we peremptorily refuse to surrender our judgments to your guidance, and to throw the protection secured to agriculture by the existing law, into the lottery of legislation, in the faint hope that we might, by chance, draw the prize of a better Corn bill."

On the fifth night of the debate the House divided, when there appeared for going into committee 195, against the motion 342—majority in favour of the Corn Laws, 147. But great as was this majority, the agriculturists did not exult in their victory, nor were the manufacturers disheartened by defeat. Both parties saw clearly that the war was only begun.

It was evident that a new political contest had commenced between the landed proprietors on the one side, and the mercantile interests on the other. Under such circumstances, the existence of a neutral ministry was an obvious anomaly ; the Corn Laws too vitally affected the interests of the nation, to remain much longer an open question in the cabinet, and it was almost universally desired that a motion should be so framed as to necessitate a decisive opinion from the ministry on the great issue between Free Trade and Monopoly. Unfortunately, attention was diverted from this subject by Lord Roden's motion for an inquiry into the

state of Ireland since 1835, with respect to the commission of crime. Chiefly, by the aid of Lord Brougham, this motion was carried by a majority of five. Ministers, regarding this as an implied vote of censure, Lord John Russell immediately after the Easter recess announced his intention of demanding, from the House of Commons, an express vote of approbation of the course pursued by ministers in the government of Ireland. Such a vote, as Sir Robert Peel clearly saw, would interpose an insurmountable obstacle to the immediate assumption of power by the Conservative party, and he felt anything but grateful to Lord Brougham, for the unseasonable interference which had rendered such a course inevitable. In fact, on this, and on many other occasions, his lordship was more formidable as an ally to the party which he joined, than as an adversary to that which he abandoned. Sir Robert Peel on his part gave notice of an amendment to Lord John Russell's motion, declaring in substance that such a proceeding was unnecessary.

The debate began on the 15th of April, and was protracted to the 19th: Lord John Russell stated from the outset that the existence of the government was staked on its issue, and referring to the expectations of a probable change of administration, said—"However I may think such a change would be dangerous to Ireland, and embarrassing to the rest of the empire, I must say that personally as regards ourselves, I do not think we shall have any reason to regret our retirement." Sir Robert Peel, in a long and laboured speech, denied that Lord Roden's motion was a vote of censure, and pointed out the danger of courting a collision with the House of Peers. On the Irish question, he spoke with great moderation, professing sincere personal respect for Earl Mulgrave, recently created Marquis of Normanby, but censuring the favour he had shown to avowed agitators, and his indiscriminate exercise of the prerogative of pardon. But this politic course



THE HON<sup>BLE</sup> CONSTANTINE HENRY PHIPPS, 2<sup>ND</sup> MARQUESS OF NORMANDY

Normandy



was not followed by the other Conservative members ; the Irish supporters of Sir Robert Peel indulged in fierce invectives against the Marquis of Normanby, and attributed to his encouragement of agitation all the agrarian outrages which had taken place in Ireland. It was this imprudence of which Lord Morpeth was able to take advantage, and call upon the House to pronounce a direct opinion on the principle of government to be applied to Ireland.

“ I shall abstain, on this occasion, from entering into any question of mere general policy. Ireland is the battle-field on which, during the career of the present administration, almost all the chief conflicts, both of party and of opinion, have been fought. Ireland is also the topic which, on this occasion, has been singled out and selected as the point on which to press the administration home—to damage, if possible, its reputation—and to affix upon it an abiding stigma. Else—what was the object of the recent demonstration of the House of Lords, whether it is to be taken according to the turn which honourable gentlemen have found it more convenient to give it—(at least if this may be judged by the words of the proposed amendment, which, characterized in the lines supplied by the honourable member for Belfast—

Willing to wound, and yet afraid to strike,  
Just hints a fault, and hesitates dislike;)—

or whether it is to be taken according to what I suspect to be the more accurate conception of the matter—but as an attempt to supersede the present government in the due conduct and control of the executive government of Ireland, and to substitute, instead, another system utterly at variance with it. But be this as it may, at all events we are now determined to have this point cleared up. We will not accept your commentaries, nor your glosses, nor your palliations ; we will leave no room for ambiguity ; we have had enough of partial attacks and isolated charges—of inuendoes

and abuse—of motions for papers here, and for committees there. We now come for a direct, an unequivocal opinion at your hands ; we will take no low ground ; we will exist no longer on sufferance. We tell you that we will not put up with passive acquiescence, or bare endurance. We will not be even contented with acquittal. My noble friend asks you this night for a direct, downright vote of approbation. In the name of the Irish government—and of the whole government, as implicated in its Irish policy—I assert, fearlessly, that we have deserved well of our country. This is a conviction, of which no taunts of yours can lessen the force ; and upon this issue I call on you, the representatives of the empire, to come this night to the vote.”

Sir Robert Peel’s amendment was rejected, and Lord John Russell’s motion carried by a majority of twenty-two. To complete the embarrassments which the Conservatives imprudently brought on themselves, the Irish Corporation bill was again so changed in the Lords, as to be rejected by the Commons, and thus the settlement of this difficult question was adjourned to another session.

A more favourable battle-ground for the Conservatives than Ireland, was furnished by Jamaica. In no colony had the abolition of slavery been more fiercely resisted than in Jamaica ; the local House of Assembly from the first refused to sanction the measures necessary for carrying out the intentions of the imperial legislature. After some sharp collisions between the House of Assembly and the Colonial government, the former virtually abandoned its legislative functions ; and Mr. Labouchere introduced a bill into the House of Commons, suspending the existing constitution of Jamaica for five years, and transferring, during the same period, the legislative functions of the House of Assembly to the governor and council. Many, even of the usual supporters of ministers, were opposed to these proceedings,

which they regarded as unnecessarily harsh. They attributed them to the suggestions of the anti-slavery society, a body which had of late declined in popularity, and which, it must be confessed, had shown too great a tendency for meddling with matters beyond its proper sphere. Moderate men were disposed to make great allowances for the House of Assembly ; its members had been recently deprived of an ascendancy, which, however unjustifiable in itself, had been sanctioned by long usage ; it could not be easy to admit those to all the privileges of their equals, who had recently been their slaves ; and, besides, it was generally believed that some coercive power would be necessary to induce the emancipated negroes to cultivate the soil. The ministerial measure had not sufficient popularity to resist the influence which the West India interest brought to bear against it ; and when Sir Robert Peel, after considerable hesitation, resolved to make a stand in favour of the legislature of Jamaica, he found that he would have the support of many who usually ranked as his political opponents. A division, however, was not taken until the beginning of May, when there appeared—in favour of the bill 194, against it 189, leaving the ministers a majority only of five.

On the evening of the 7th of May, ministers declared, that with so narrow a majority, they were unable to conduct the public service with advantage, and that they had therefore tendered their resignations, which had been accepted. No other course, indeed, was open to them. Such scanty support could not have enabled them to carry the Jamaica bill through its several stages, and would have been still more insufficient for the measures they proposed to introduce for regulating the government of the Canadas. After an interval of four years, Sir Robert Peel was once more invited to form an administration.

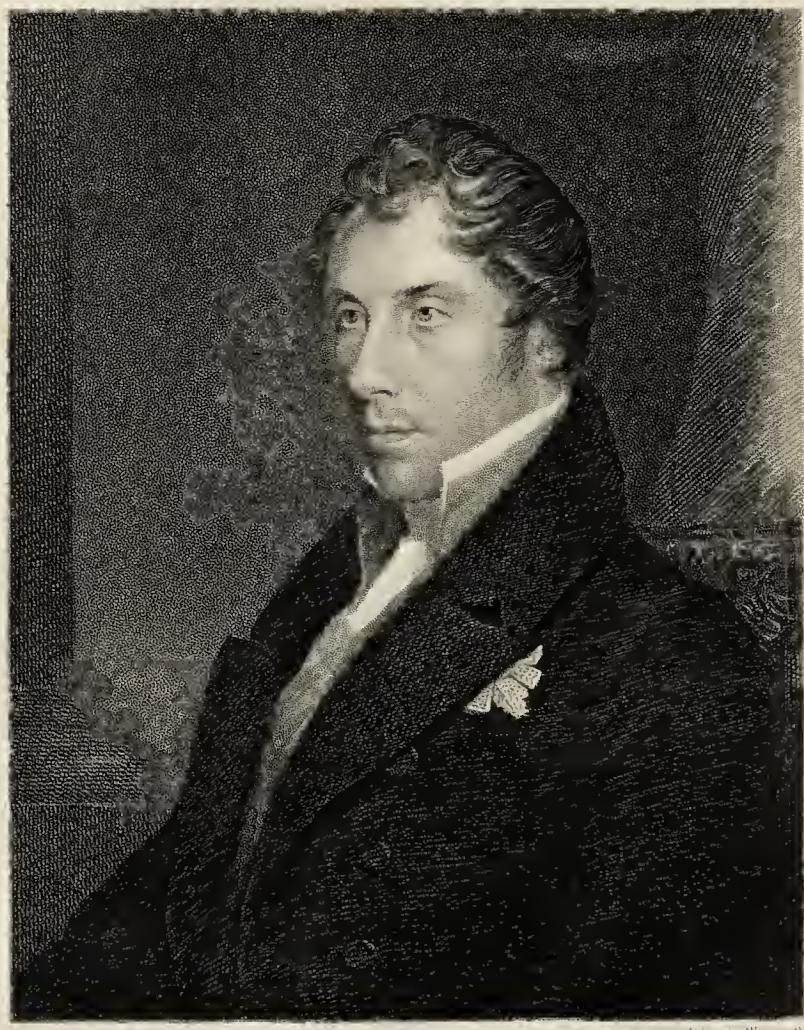
## CHAPTER IV.

RESTORATION AND FINAL DISSOLUTION OF THE  
MELBOURNE ADMINISTRATION.

IT has been more than once necessary to remark that Sir Robert Peel's triumphs in opposition have been the greatest obstacles to his success as minister. The Conservative display at Merchant Tailors' Hall; the vote of censure pronounced by the House of Lords on the Marquis of Normanby's administration in Ireland; his position as the chief supporter of the Corn Laws and principal stay of the landed interest; and the general distaste with which the alliance between O'Connell and the Whigs was viewed throughout England—had largely contributed to place him in office, and still more largely to embarrass him after he had obtained possession of power. A coalition with the Whigs, or any section of their party, was rendered impossible by the banquet; the manufacturing interests were alienated by the speech on the Corn Laws; and Ireland—meaning, of course, the Catholic majority of its population—was rendered implacably hostile; and, what was worse, able to assign very plausible causes for its hostility. These were no very cheering circumstances; especially when taken in connection with the fact, that on the most difficult question at issue, the policy to be pursued towards Ireland, the ministers would have to face a hostile majority of twenty.

The Queen first sent for the Duke of Wellington, and, on his recommendation, applied to Sir Robert Peel. In the first interview, her Majesty, with characteristic frankness, declared





Engraved by Wm H.

London J. W. & Co.

GEORGE HAMILTON-GORDON EARL OF ABERDEEN K T F A S &c &c

*Aberdeen*

that she had parted from her late ministers with great regret, as they had given her entire satisfaction ; but, at the same time, professed her determination to act with perfect fairness and openness towards the new administration. Sir Robert Peel then named the persons whom he intended to invite to become his colleagues. They were, the Duke of Wellington, Lord Lyndhurst, the Earl of Aberdeen, Lord Ellenborough, Lord Stanley, Sir James Graham, Sir Henry Hardinge, and Mr. Goulburn. This list showed that the Queen was not likely to be gratified in her cherished wish for a coalition ; but she made no objection to any of the names, though she intimated a wish that the Duke of Wellington should hold a substantive and responsible place in the cabinet.

After leaving the Queen, Sir Robert Peel called his intended colleagues together ; and deliberating for some time on the aspect of affairs, the arrangement of the household was brought under discussion. Sir Robert Peel thought it of importance, as an indication of her Majesty's confidence, that certain offices in the household, of the highest rank, if not voluntarily relinquished by the ladies holding them, should be subject to some change ; although, in some instances, the absence of all political feeling might render such a change unnecessary. There is reason to doubt that this ungracious suggestion originated with Sir Robert Peel himself ; but he could scarcely avoid acting upon it, when proposed by his colleagues.

On the following day Sir Robert Peel verbally communicated the matter to the Queen. She heard the announcement with undisguised astonishment and displeasure ; a brief discussion followed, which was terminated by the Queen's intimating her intention to send a written answer to the proposal. Early on Friday morning he received the following note :—

" Buckingham Palace, May 10th, 1839.

"The Queen having considered the proposal made to her yesterday by Sir Robert Peel, to remove the ladies of her bed-chamber, cannot consent to adopt a course which she conceives to be contrary to usage, and which is repugnant to her feelings."

To this letter Sir Robert Peel, after a short delay, thus replied :—

" Whitehall, May 10th, 1839.

"Sir Robert Peel presents his humble duty to your Majesty, and has had the honour of receiving your Majesty's note of this morning. In respectfully submitting to your Majesty's pleasure, and humbly returning into your Majesty's hands the important trust which your Majesty had been graciously pleased to commit to him, Sir Robert Peel trusts that your Majesty will permit him to state to your Majesty his impression with respect to the circumstances which have led to the termination of his attempt to form an administration for the conduct of your Majesty's service.

"In the interview with which your Majesty honoured Sir Robert Peel yesterday morning, after he had submitted to your Majesty the names of those whom he proposed to recommend to your Majesty for the principal executive appointments, he mentioned to your Majesty his earnest wish to be enabled, by your Majesty's sanction, so to constitute your Majesty's household, that your Majesty's confidential servants might have the advantage of a public demonstration of your Majesty's full support and confidence, and that, at the same time, as far as possible, consistently with that demonstration, each individual appointment in the household should be entirely acceptable to your Majesty's personal feelings.

"On your Majesty expressing a desire that the Earl of

Liverpool should hold an office in the household, Sir Robert Peel requested your Majesty's permission at once to offer to Lord Liverpool the office of Lord Steward, or any other which he might prefer.

"Sir Robert Peel then observed that he should have every wish to apply a similar principle to the chief appointments which are filled by the ladies of your Majesty's household; upon which your Majesty was pleased to remark, that you must reserve the whole of these appointments, and that it was your Majesty's pleasure that the whole should continue as at present, without any change.

"The Duke of Wellington, in the interview to which your Majesty subsequently admitted him, understood also that this was your Majesty's determination, and concurred with Sir Robert Peel in opinion, that, considering the great difficulties of the present crisis, and the expediency of making every effort, in the first instance, to conduct the public business of the country with the aid of the present parliament, it was essential to the success of the commission with which your Majesty had honoured Sir Robert Peel, that he should have that public proof of your Majesty's entire support and confidence, which would be afforded by the permission to make some changes in that part of your Majesty's household which your Majesty resolved on maintaining entirely without change.

"Having had the opportunity, through your Majesty's gracious consideration, of reflecting upon this point, he humbly submits to your Majesty, that he is reluctantly compelled, by a sense of public duty, and of the interest of your Majesty's service, to adhere to the opinion which he ventured to express to your Majesty. He trusts he may be permitted, at the same time, to express to your Majesty his grateful acknowledgments for the distinction which your Majesty conferred upon him, by requiring his advice and

assistance in the attempt to form an administration, and his earnest prayer that whatever arrangements your Majesty may be enabled to make for that purpose, may be most conducive to your Majesty's personal comfort and happiness, and to the promotion of the public welfare."

The negociation was thus brought to a close; Sir Robert Peel abandoned the task of forming an administration, and Lord Melbourne's ministry was restored. On the 13th of May, Lord John Russell took the first opportunity of stating, that since he last addressed the House, Sir Robert Peel had received authority from her Majesty to form a new administration, and that the attempt had failed; he added, that her Majesty had been graciously pleased to permit the right honourable baronet to state the circumstances which led to that failure.

Sir Robert Peel having narrated the events of the week, as we have already stated them, entered into a warm vindication of the course which he had adopted. We shall only quote so much of the speech as relates to his own personal feelings and conduct :—

"Sir, I did decline to undertake the duty of forming an administration, on the express understanding that the whole of the appointments held by ladies of the court should, without exception, be continued: but I did so on public principles, and from a sincere belief that it was impossible for me to encounter the difficulties by which I was encompassed, in attempting to conduct public affairs, unless I had the fullest and most unequivocal proof that I possessed the confidence of her Majesty. It appeared to me that there never was a period when the demonstration of that confidence was more absolutely necessary for a minister. The duties of the office of a prime minister are, I conceive, the most arduous and the most important than any human being can be called on to discharge: it is the greatest trust, almost

without one single exception, in the civilized world, which can be devolved upon any individual. Sir, I was ready to undertake the performance of those duties ; but could I look around me at the present condition of public affairs—could I look around me, and not see that it was my absolute duty to this country, and, above all, to her Majesty, to require that every aid that could be given me should be given ? What were the questions which would immediately press for my decision ? The state of India—the state of Jamaica —the state of Canada—would all require my immediate consideration ; and, with respect to some of them, the proposal of legislative measures. I considered the internal state of this country—I saw insurrection in the provinces—I saw the letter of the noble lord opposite (Lord John Russell,) inviting the respectable part of the population of this country to form themselves into armed societies for resisting outrage.

“ Surely, sir, in addition to the ordinary difficulties besetting the course of a prime minister, there are circumstances which render that position, at the present moment, peculiarly onerous and arduous. I had a strong impression that it was my duty to make every effort to conduct public affairs through the intervention of the present parliament. I did not think it was desirable to follow the course taken in 1834, and commence the government by a dissolution. After the frequent dissolutions that have taken place, and in the balanced state of parties, it was my deep conviction that it was my duty to make every effort, in the first instance, to conduct public affairs through the intervention of the present parliament. But what is my condition in the present parliament ? I should begin the government in a minority. I did not shrink from the difficulty : but, considering the questions that press for decision—considering the internal state of this country—could I overlook this important fact,

that, in the House of Commons, I should not commence my career commanding a majority? Now, I ask this plain question:—Being invited to take upon myself the responsibility of conducting public affairs, and taking it without the confidence of the House of Commons, could I ask for less than that I should have, at least, the demonstration of the entire and unqualified confidence of the crown? Her Majesty's ministers retired on the question of Jamaica, being in a majority of five: I should have had to undertake the settlement of the Jamaica question being in a minority of five, and that minority including ten gentlemen on whose support I could not calculate, probably, on any other question which I should have occasion to bring before the House. The first conflict I should have to fight would be on the selection of a speaker. On the very first day that I took my seat in the House of Commons as minister of this great country, I should have to risk the fate of government upon the choice of a speaker.

“ These considerations, sir, impressed me with the clearest conviction that it was a public duty on my part—an indispensable public duty which I owed to the country, and which I owed especially to the Queen herself, as the sovereign of that country—to seek for every possible demonstration that I possessed her Majesty's entire confidence. And I do confess to you, without reserve and without hesitation, that it appeared to me that, if the chief offices of the Queen's household were to be held by the immediate relatives of those ministers whom I displaced—the relatives of my future opponents and rivals for political power—it did appear to me that I never could impress the country with the conviction that I, as a minister, was possessed of the entire confidence of my sovereign.

“ Sir, let me take that particular question on which my chief difficulty would arise. Who can conceal from himself

that my difficulties were--not Canada? that my difficulties were—not Jamaica? that my difficulties were—Ireland? [Mr. O'Connell, and other honourable members—Hear, hear!] I admit it fully, and thank you for the confirmation of my argument which those cheers afford. And what is the fact? I, undertaking to be a minister of the crown, and wishing to carry on public affairs through the intervention of the present House of Commons, in order that I might exempt the country from the agitation, and possibly the peril, of a dissolution—I, upon that very question of Ireland, should have begun in a minority of upwards of twenty members. A majority of twenty-two had decided in favour of the policy of the Irish government. The chief members of the Irish government, whose administration was so approved of, were the Marquis of Normanby and the noble lord opposite, the member for Yorkshire (Lord Morpeth). By whom are the two chief officees in the household at this moment held? By the sister of Lord Morpeth, and by the wife of Lord Normanby. Let me not, for a moment, be supposed to say a word not fraught with respect towards those two ladies, who cast a lustre on the society in which they move, less by their rank than by their accomplishments and virtues; but still they stand in the situation of the nearest relatives of the two members of the government whose policy was approved by this House, and disapproved by me. Now, I ask any man in the House, whether it is possible that I could, with propriety and honour, undertake the conduct of an administration, and the management of Irish affairs, in this House, consenting previously, as an express preliminary stipulation, that the two ladies I have named, together with all others, should be retained in their appointments about the court and person of the sovereign?"

To complete Sir Robert Peel's case of vindication, we shall insert part of his reply to an address of confidence,

presented, on this occasion, to him and the Duke of Wellington, by the Conservative inhabitants of Shrewsbury.

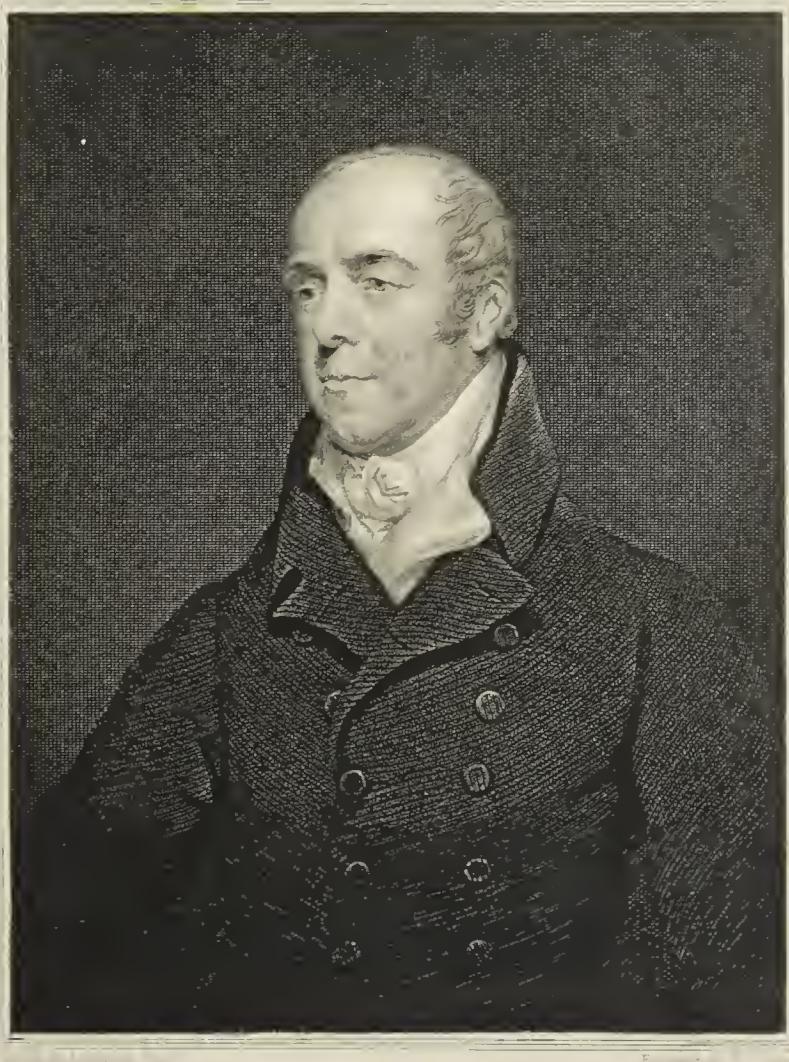
"I am," said he, "firmly persuaded that the constitution of this country does not recognize any distinction in respect to public appointments, provided for by act of parliament, and instituted for purposes of state, on account of the sex of the parties holding them; and that no minister would be justified in divesting himself of all control and responsibility in respect to a particular class of such appointments."

"If I deemed certain changes in that class necessary for public purposes, it was as clearly my duty to advise them, as it was the duty of Lords Grey and Grenville, in 1812, to require 'that the connection of the great officers of the court with the political administration should be clearly established in its first arrangements.'

"They claimed for themselves the credit which I claim, of having acted on public grounds; and they assigned, as the justification of *their* conduct, the very same ground which is the justification of *mine*—namely, their firm conviction, that it was necessary to give to a new government that character of efficiency and stability, and those marks of the constitutional support of the crown, which were required to enable it to act usefully for the public service.

"If the constitution does recognize a distinction between public appointments on account of the sex of the parties holding them, the example of Lords Grey and Grenville, in 1812, is certainly no authority. If the constitution does not recognize such a distinction, there is no difference between the principle for which I contended, and that upon which Lord Grey and Lord Grenville acted."

Lord John Russell admitted the general accuracy of Sir Robert Peel's statements, but contended that the demand which he made for power to change the entire household was not warranted by precedent; and he declared that he



WILLIAM WYNDHAM GRENVILLE, LORD GRENVILLE.

Grenville



and his colleagues were willing to take on themselves the responsibility of her Majesty's refusal. Little additional light was thrown upon the subject by the explanations in the House of Lords. It appeared, but not very clearly, that the Duke of Wellington had been the first to moot the question of the household, and that he had remonstrated with the Queen on the subject, without making any impression. He alluded rather vaguely to the influence of reports and conversations, adding this remarkable declaration :—

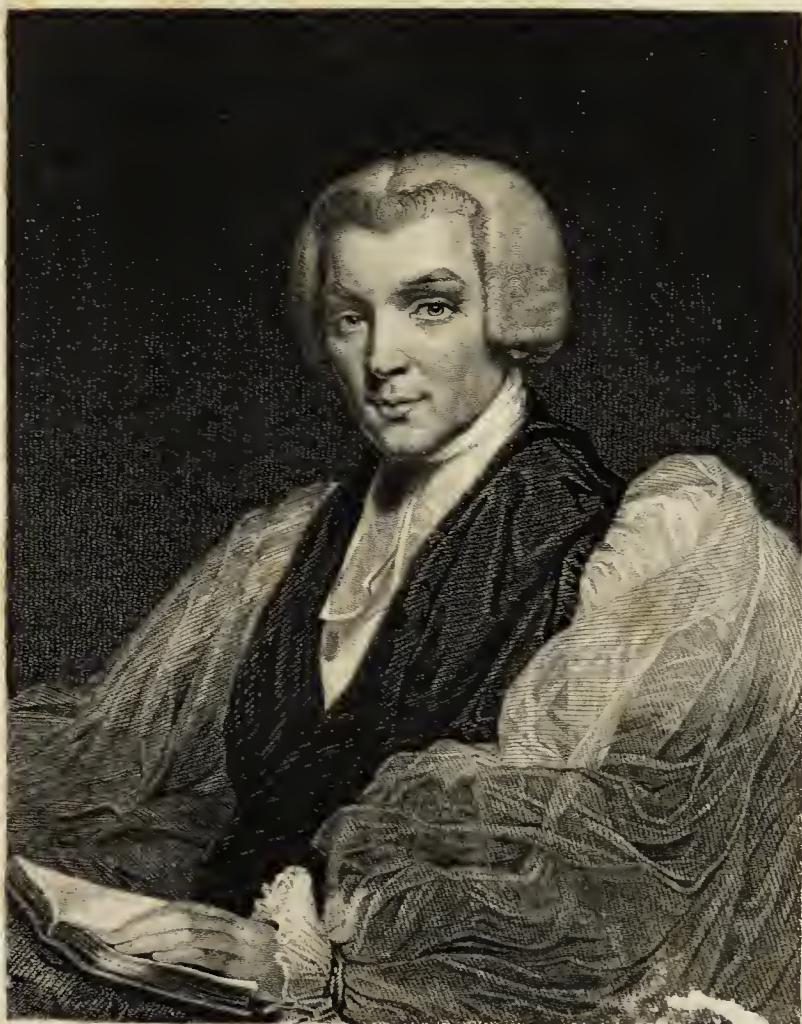
“ My lords, I cannot but think that the principles on which we proposed to act with respect to the ladies of the bedchamber, in the case of a queen-regnant, were the correct principles. The public will not believe that the Queen holds no political conservations with those ladies, and that politieal influence is not exercised by them, particularly considering who the persons are who now hold such situations. I believe the history of this country affords a number of instances in which secret and improper influence has been exercised by means of such conversations. I have, my lords, a somewhat strong opinion on this subject. I have unworthily filled the office which the noble viscount now so worthily holds, and I must say I have felt the inconvenience of an anomalous influence—not exercised, perhaps, by ladies, but anomalous influence undoubtedly, of this description, and exerted simply in conversations ; and I will tell the noble viscount that the country is at this moment suffering some inconvenience from the exercise of that very secret influence.”

Lord Melbourne briefly but emphatically denied that any such influence existed. A subsequent debate in the House of Lords, remarkable chiefly for a violent philippic which Lord Brougham delivered against his former colleagues, elicited only one fact, namely, that the Marchioness of Normanby, on hearing that a question had been raised respecting tho

ladies of the household, at once tendered her resignation of the post which she held.

Some obscurity still hangs over this entire transaction, but we believe that reliance may be placed on the following statement. On the announcement of the resignation of the Melbourne ministry, certain Conservative ladies of high rank had offensively spoken of the event as a triumph over the Queen, and boasted that her Majesty would be kept in more order than she had been by the Whigs. These insulting remarks had been communicated to the Queen immediately before Sir Robert Peel made his proposal respecting the household, and her Majesty naturally viewed his demand as a fulfilment of the offensive threat, and imagined that she was not only to be separated from her personal friends, but that she was about to be surrounded by persons who would act as eheeks and spies on her conduct. Sir Robert Peel, not aware of the strength and nature of her Majesty's opinions, did not explain the extent to whieh he desired to have power over the household ; there was thus misconception and misunderstanding on both sides, and Sir Robert Peel seems to have felt too little interest in the result to attempt an elucidation. In fact, it was his wish that matters should remain as they were until a new election should decisively determine the relative parliamentary strength of parties. The prudence of such a course appeared from the trial of strength which took place on the election of a new speaker, when Mr. Abererombie, in consequence of increasing years and infirmities, resigned the chair. Mr. Shaw Lefevre, the ministerial candidate, was elected by a majority of eighteen over Mr. Goulburn, the Conservative candidate, so that had Sir Robert Peel succeeded in forming an administration, he would have had to encounter a damaging defeat on the very threshold of office.





THE MOST REVERED AND HONORABLE BISHOP OF CANTERBURY

*W. Cantuar*

Lord Stanley provoked a second trial of party strength on the question of national education. A committee of the Privy Council had been constituted, to administer the parliamentary grant which had been voted to aid the schools established by the great educational societies—a course which Lord Stanley himself had more than sanctioned when, as Secretary for Ireland, he established a Board of National Education in that country. He now took a different course, and moved that the House should address the Queen to rescind the minute by which the committee was appointed. He was defeated only by a majority of five, and the grant itself was only carried by a majority of two—so nearly was the country on the point of losing the inestimable advantages derived since from the extension of the blessings of national education. A motion similar to Lord Stanley's was made in the House of Lords by the Archbishop of Canterbury, and it was carried by a majority of more than one hundred. It would be equally painful and unnecessary to revive the memory of these debates, particularly as Sir Robert Peel and his friends, who then supported Lord Stanley, have since rendered most effective service to the cause of national education.

Though the affairs of Canada were made the subject of long debates, the arrangement of a constitution for that country was adjourned indefinitely by the tacit consent of all parties; a compromise also was made on the Jamaica question—the constitution of the island was not suspended, but the governor and council were empowered to make provision for the administration of justice, and other executive functions, should the House of Assembly persevere in its contumacy. These instances of weakness and indecision were, however, amply redeemed by the courage which the ministers vindicated in adopting the bold measure of a uniform penny-postage. Sir Robert Peel opposed the plan, princi-

pally on the ground of the loss to the revenue, at a time when the deficiency of income to meet expenditure exceeded a million sterling. The plan, which had originated with Mr. Rowland Hill, was too popular to be resisted ; it passed the Commons by large majorities, and, at the request of the Duke of Wellington, was sanctioned by the Lords without a division.

Immediately after the close of the session, some important changes were made in the Cabinet. The Marquis of Normanby, who had been succeeded by Lord Ebrington in the vice-royalty of Ireland, and had since been Secretary for the Colonies, exchanged places with Lord John Russell, who was Secretary for the Home Department. Mr. Francis Baring became Chancellor of the Exchequer in place of Mr. Spring Rice, who was raised to the peerage by the title of Baron Monteagle ; Mr. Poulett Thompson was sent as Governor to Canada, and was succeeded at the Board of Trade by Mr. Labouchere ; the Earl of Clarendon received the Privy Seal ; Sir George Grey was admitted into the Cabinet. These new arrangements led to the resignation of Lord Howick (since Earl Grey), and his brother-in-law, Mr. (since, Sir) Charles Wood. Upon this, three Irish members were brought into office : Mr. More O'Ferrall became Secretary of the Admiralty ; Mr. Wyse, a Lord of the Treasury ; and Mr. Sheil, Vice-President of the Board of Trade.

In the course of the year, the Chartists engaged in several serious conflicts with the police and the military. One of the most serious riots took place in Birmingham, where some houses were burned, and several lives lost. At the close of the year, a body of Chartists, headed by a person named Frost, made an attack on the town of Newport, in Wales ; but though his followers are said to have amounted to eight or ten thousand men, they were easily dispersed by about thirty soldiers, and a score of policemen. The suppression





Engraved by J. C. Chapman

HER ROYAL HIGHNESS VICTORIA MARY LOUISA, DUCHESS OF KENT.

*Victoria*

of these outbreaks seemed completely to dispel the delusions of the Chartists ; they ceased to hold meetings of their own, or to disturb those of others ; the hostility of the lower ranks to the middle classes disappeared, and a cordial understanding began to be established between the employers and the operatives in the manufacturing districts.

We must now briefly allude to a distressing event which took place at an early period of the year, and contributed in no small degree to render the court unpopular with the country. Lady Flora Hastings, who was attached to the person of the Duchess of Kent, suffered under a disease which exhibited some of the symptoms usual in pregnancy. Suspicious whispers were circulated through the court, and the Queen insisted that the lady should undergo a medical examination. Her innocence was fully established, but grief and indignation accelerated the progress of the disease under which she suffered, and her death was popularly attributed to the indignity she had endured. The Conservatives, enraged at the restoration of the Melbourne ministry to power by court influence, took advantage of this incident to attack the court, and the Queen herself, with an intemperate violence, which passed the limits even of ordinary decency. At a meeting in Canterbury, Mr. Bradshaw, the Conservative member for that city, was reported to have spoken of the Queen in the following terms :—“Brought up under the auspices of the citizen king of the Belgians, the serf of France, and guided by his influence, the Queen thinks that if the monarchy lasts her time, it is enough ; but the people of England will never consent that the crown shall be degraded and debased for the inglorious ease of any created being, nor that the personal wishes and caprices of the sovereign shall direct the conduct of the executive. The monarchy has its rights, but it has also its duties. The

people of this country will not be trampled on by pope or sovereign, still less will they endure that a petty German prince shall hold the fair realm of England in fee-farm. We have not forgotten the forced abdication of the second James, nor are we ignorant that the title of the throne to these realms is that derived from a Protestant princess. No man can regret more than I do the growing unpopularity of the Queen and her court; but look at the composition of that court and its acts. The courtiers and ministers are identical, and their petty and criminal intrigues are carried into every department of the state. The courts of former sovereigns have been as frivolous and more vicious even than the present, but the government of the country, and the direction of public affairs, have been carried on by statesmen of known and recognized ability, honour, and independence:— men who were neither the boon-companions of the sovereign, nor the willing slaves of royal follies and caprices. I believe in my conscience that the favourite equerries are younger, better looking, and better dressed than Sir Robert Peel, that Lord Melbourne can tell a tale meet for a lady's ear better than the Duke of Wellington, and that neither Lord Stanley nor Sir James Graham can compete with my Lord Normanby, in getting up a pageant; but are these the qualifications which the people of England prize so much, as to sacrifice to them their religion, their national honour, and the care of their ancient institutions?"

After this speech had been studiously circulated for nearly six months, and made the theme for every kind of comment, Mr. Bradshaw, when reproached on the subject in the House of Commons, declared that he had not been accurately reported! It is probable that he would earlier have disclaimed such a scandalous libel on his sovereign, if he would not at the same time have been compelled to confess that

being unable to make a speech himself, he had imperfectly delivered the composition of another, without clearly comprehending its meaning or purport.

A second personal attack was made on the Queen by Mr. Roby of Lancashire, at a Conservative dinner in Ashton-under-Line. As several military officers were present, the matter was brought under the consideration of the Commander-in-Chief, who very severely censured persons for listening to a libel on the person and character of the sovereign whose commission they held. Sir Robert Peel keenly felt the discredit that the conduct of such intemperate partisans was bringing on the Conservative party, and at his earnest remonstrances the practice was discontinued. In the meanwhile public attention was excited by the announcement of the Queen's approaching marriage. On the 23rd of November, her Majesty announced her determination to the Members of the Privy Council, assembled at Buckingham Palace, in the following terms:—

“ I have caused you to be summoned at the present time, in order that I may acquaint you with my resolution in a matter which deeply concerns the welfare of my people and the happiness of my future life.

“ It is my intention to ally myself in marriage with the Prince Albert of Saxe-Coburg and Gotha. Deeply impressed with the solemnity of the engagement which I am about to contract, I have not come to this decision without mature consideration, nor without feeling a strong assurance that, with the blessing of the Almighty, it will at once secure my domestic felicity, and serve the interests of the country.

“ I have thought fit to make this resolution known to you at the earliest period, in order that you may be fully apprised of a matter so highly important to me and my kingdom, and which, I persuade myself, will be most acceptable to my loving subjects.”

Though this announcement gave general satisfaction throughout the country, it excited some secret displeasure among some of the Conservatives, because the Saxe-Coburg family had become, from its various connections, rather closely connected with the liberal party throughout Europe. On the other hand, ministers and their friends manifested no little jealousy of the rather ostentatious tour made by the Queen-Dowager in the Midland Counties. She honoured only Conservative noblemen and gentlemen by her visits. Sir Robert Peel received her most splendidly at Drayton Manor, and at the same time sedulously laboured to prevent the entertainment from taking the character of a political demonstration ; but in the excitement produced by the nearly equal balance of parties, even his habitual caution was insufficient to avert suspicion. To such an extent, indeed, had the rabid spirit of party advanced that, when the ministers attended the usual civic dinner given in Guildhall on Lord Mayor's Day, they were hissed and groaned by the violent Conservatives, and the whole assembly was thus thrown into a state of most disgraceful confusion. There was probably never a period when political differences produced a more disturbing influence on the relations of social and private life, because at no former crisis was the formation of a ministry sufficiently strong to conduct the government of the country with spirit and efficacy, a problem of more difficult solution. It cannot be denied, that if the nation at large had then possessed the power to elect a minister, Sir Robert Peel would have obtained a vast preponderance of suffrages in his favour ; but his chief difficulty lay in the choice of colleagues; the nation desired him to be associated with Liberals, while all the old ties of party, rendered more stringent by recent circumstances, bound him fast to the Conservatives.

The spleen of party was exhibited on topics where such a display could not reasonably have been expected. A snarling

debate was raised on the Queen's Speech announcing her approaching marriage, because it was not expressly stated that the husband she had chosen was a Protestant. The bill for naturalizing Prince Albert was resisted, because it was proposed to give precedence, as Prince-Consort, next to the heir-apparent; and the clauses relating to precedence were abandoned. It was proposed to settle upon the Prince an annuity of £50,000 annually; but the Conservatives, under Sir Robert Peel, having united with the Economists, under Mr. Hume, ministers were defeated, and the pension was reduced to £30,000. In the debate, Lord John Russell sharply alluded to the many attacks which had been recently made upon her Majesty by certain members of the Conservative party. "I certainly am bound," he said, "to give every credit to the noble lord (Eliot), who, at the same time that he supported reduction, made great professions of respect for her Majesty, and of anxiety for her Majesty's domestic comforts; and I only wish that such language had not been confined to him, or the speeches of this night, but had been general among those who maintain the same opinion with himself, and that it had not been reserved for the beginning of the session, but had been continued ever since parliament met last year. I feel bound to say this, because the noble lord, in supporting the reduction, said he was doing so with every respect for her Majesty. And when professions of extraordinary respect are made, I cannot forget that no sovereign of this country has been insulted in such a manner as her present Majesty."

Sir Robert Peel complained very bitterly of this insinuation, and, in voting for the reduced sum, thus vindicated himself: "I will not condescend to rebut the charge of want of loyalty and respect; I have no compunction of conscience on that ground—I never made a concession of sentiment on the part of the sovereign, a condition of my

loyalty. I have never been otherwise than respectful towards my sovereign ; not one word, not one breath of disloyalty to the crown, or any member of the royal family, however adverse their political sentiments were to mine, has ever escaped my lips, and in the performance of my duty to this House and to the Crown, I should deem myself unworthy of the position which I hold—of my station as a member of the House of Commons—if I hesitated to take a straightforward course without needless professions of loyalty, or without a defence against accusations which I believe to be unfounded."

The question of Privilege raised by Stoekdale, was again brought before the House of Commons. Orders had been given in the preceding session, that Mr. Hansard should not take defence to any action brought against him for the publication of papers printed by order of parliament. Judgment was therefore given against Hansard, and a writ of inquiry to assess damages was addressed to "the sheriff of Middlesex," that is, to the two sheriffs of London, who, in law, constitute one sheriff for the county. The damages were assessed at £600. The House forbade any further proceeding, but as Stoekdale and the sheriffs still persevered, they were taken into custody. Lord John Russell subsequently introduced a bill to protect the printing of parliamentary papers, which, after receiving some slight modifications in the Lords, finally passed into a law. Thus terminated a very unpleasant business, which greatly diminished the popularity of ministers in the City of London. This induced Sir John Yarde Buller to bring forward a formal motion for a vote of want of confidence in ministers. He did so on the 28th of January, and originated the most important and protracted debate which had yet taken place in the Reformed House of Commons.

Sir J. Y. Buller rested his proposed censure on the

encouragement given by ministers to that popular agitation which had produced the riots of Newport and Birmingham—on their alliance with the Irish agitators, notoriously enemies to the Established Church—on their distribution of patronage—on their want of unity on important constitutional questions—and on their having allowed Mr. Owen, the Socialist, to be presented to the Queen. The introduction of the last circumstance had an obvious tendency to throw ridicule on the other charges, and it was dropped during the debate. Lord Howick took an early opportunity of stating his reasons for quitting the ministry; its late arrangements, he declared, did not appear of a nature to give strength to the cabinet, or win confidence from the country. Sir James Graham assailed the distribution of ministerial patronage, and averred, that promotion in the navy had been perverted to parliamentary jobbing. He was answered by Mr. Macaulay in one of the most brilliant speeches ever delivered in a deliberative assembly. His conclusion was particularly eloquent and effective. “I believe,” he said, “that if, with the best and purest intentions, the right honourable baronet, (Sir R. Peel,) were to undertake the government of this country, he would find that *it was very easy to lose the confidence of the party which raised him to power, but very difficult indeed to gain that which the present government happily possessed—the confidence of the people of Ireland.* It is upon these grounds, and principally upon the question of Ireland, that I would be inclined to rest the case of the present ministry.

“Would to God that I were speaking to an audience that would judge this great controversy fairly, with an unbiassed mind, and as it will be judged by future ages; the passions which inflame us, the sophistries whieh delude us, will not last for ever. The paroxysms of faction have their appointed season, even the madness of fanaticism is but for a day—the

time is coming when our conflicts will be to others as the conflicts of our forefathers are to us; when our priests who convulse the state—our politicians who make a stalking-horse of the church—will be no more than the Harleys and the Saeheverells of a bygone day; and when will be told, in a language very different from that which now draws forth applause at Exeter Hall, the story of these troubled years.

“Then it will be said, that there was a portion of the empire whieh presented a striking contrast to the rest; not that it was doomed to sterility, for the soil was fruitful and well watered—not that it wanted facilities for commerce and trade, for its coasts abounded in havens marked by nature to be the marts of the whole world—not that the people were too proud to improve these advantages, or too pusillanimous to defend them, for in endurance of toil and gallantry of spirit they were conspicuous amongst the nations,—but the bounty of nature was rendered unavailable by the tyranny of man.

“Whether the result of this debate will be victory or defeat, I know not; but I know that there are defeats not less glorious than victory itself: and yet I have seen and shared in some glorious victories. Those were proud and happy days, when, amidst the praises and blessings of millions, my noble friend (Lord John Russell) led us on in the great struggle for the Reform bill—when hundreds waited round our door till sunrise to hear the tidings of our success—and when the great cities of the empire poured forth their populations on the highways, to meet the mails that were bringing from the capital the tidings whether the battle of the people were lost or won.

“Those days were not such as my noble friend can hope to see again. Two such triumphs would be too much for one life. But perhaps there still awaits him a less pleasing, a less exhilarating, but not a less honourable task, the task

of contending against superior numbers through years of discomfiture, to maintain those civil liberties, those rights of conscience, which are inseparably associated with the name of his illustrious house. At his side will not be wanting men who, against all odds, and through all the turns of fortune, amidst evil tongues and evil days, will defend to the last with unabated spirit the noble principles of John Milton and John Locke.

“ He may be driven from office—he may be doomed to a life of opposition—he may be made the mark for all the rancour of sects—he may be exposed to the fury of a Laud on one side, and to the fanaticism of a Praise-God-Barebones on the other,—but a portion of the praise which we bestow on the old martyrs and champions of freedom will not be refused by posterity to those who have, in these our days, endeavoured to bind together in real union sects and races too long hostile to each other, and to efface, by the mild influence of a paternal government the fearful traces which have been left by the misrule of ages.”

Two rather violent but otherwise not very remarkable speeches were delivered on opposite sides by Lord Stanley and Mr. O’Connell. Sir Robert Peel then rose, and delivered one of the most memorable orations uttered in the whole eourse of his political career, and from whieh we shall therefore make rather copious extracts :—

“ Two demands,” he said, “ have been made by the opposite side, in the eourse of this discussion; the one that he who is about to give his vote of want of confidence in the government, should specify the grounds upon which that vote is given ; the other, that those who from their position may be regarded as the probable successors of the government which it is sought to displace, should state upon what principles of public policy they propose to conduct the affairs of this country. The absolute justice of the first; of

these demands I willingly admit. The other demand, namely, that I should explain in detail my views of public policy, is, perhaps, not equally imperative in point of strict obligation, but it is a demand to which, from considerations of prudence, I shall most willingly accede. I will answer every question that has been put to me upon that point. There shall be no limit to the fulness and unreservedness of the answers which I will give, excepting your impatience. I know too well the little value that can be placed on that support which arises from misconception of one's real opinions,—I have seen too much of magnificent professions out of office, and of meagre performances in,—I have had too much experience of solemn engagements, entered into for the purpose of overturning a government, violated when that object had been obtained,—I have so little desire to procure a hollow confidence, either on false pretences, or by a delusive silence, that I rejoice in the opportunity of frankly declaring my opinions and intentions on every point on which you challenge unreserved explanation.

“I proceed, however, in the first instance, to a compliance with that demand which calls upon me to specify the grounds on which I intend, with perfect cordiality, to join in the motion of my honourable friend, and record my denial of confidence in the present government. I withhold my confidence from you on every ground on which confidence can be withheld—I withhold my confidence from you on the results of your public policy—on your own confessions of incompetence—on the testimony of your most valued friends—I withhold my confidence from you on account of the constitution of your government—on account of your measures—and, above all, on account of the principles which you are now forced to avow, in order that you may retain your majority, and therefore your offices.”

Referring to Lord Howick, to whom he turned as if

addressing him personally, the right honourable baronet thus continued :

“ Do you read *us* a lecture about withdrawing confidence ? What justifies you in your abandonment of your colleagues, but your utter want of confidence in them ? You left the Government upon public principle. It was no paltry squabble about office ; no pique that you or your relatives were not promoted, that induced your retirement. The time was one of extreme difficulty ; your colleagues stood in need of every support ; and bear in mind the peculiar circumstances under which you had very recently resumed office. You resumed office from an imperative sense of duty, according to your impressions of duty, to protect your Sovereign. In this debate you have said that an unjust and ungenerous attempt was made to control the Queen in respect to a part of her household. My views are totally different from yours. I think a condition was required from me which it would have been humiliating and unconstitutional to assent to. But, assume that you were right and that I was wrong, what overpowering motives for distrusting a government must you have had, that could impel you, amid all the pressing embarrassments of public affairs, when the ministers, the men whom you profess to esteem and love, were tottering from their weakness—when the Queen required protection from ‘unjust and ungenerous demands’—that could impel you to separate from your colleagues, and to abandon your Sovcreign ?

“ Changes in the government, altering its character, were the ground of your withdrawal from office. The chief addition to the cabinet at the time of your retirement was the appointment of Mr. Labouchere to be President of the Board of Trade. I was not aware that he held extreme opinions, calculated to increase the discontent and alarm of moderate men. Have the subsequent additions to the

government tended to increase your confidence? Has the appointment of your successor abated your distrust? What think you of the lecture on the sacred duty of agitation which has been delivered by that successor (Mr. Macaulay)? No! no! if you have been justified in abandoning your post, in withdrawing your co-operation from colleagues whom you know and esteem, you cannot quarrel with our much fainter demonstration of distrust."

After pointing out the differences between the members of the cabinet on several constitutional questions, he severely assailed Mr. Macaulay's recent letter in favour of the ballot, which that right honourable gentleman had rather imprudently dated from Windsor Castle.

"But the ballot! the most important of unsettled constitutional questions! how can the right honourable gentleman,—who considers secret voting indispensable to the honest discharge of the duty of an elector,—how can he act cordially in public life with the noble lord, who considers the ballot pregnant with evil in itself, and entailing what would be tantamount to revolution—namely, household suffrage? How do you meet in the cabinet to discuss the state of the country, totally differing on a great question like this, involving others of still greater magnitude? The right honourable gentleman proclaims the sacred duty of agitation. He says that no great measure can be carried without agitation. Are these mere clap-traps, to deceive the Radicals behind him? If your doctrine be good, do you intend to agitate as a member of the government? You profess to believe in the efficacy and necessity of the ballot, and you say no great question can be carried without agitation. Does your position as a cabinet minister exempt you from the duty of agitating in favour of the ballot? If you agitate in its favour, the noble lord must agitate against it. Here is the first result of your open questions. How edify-

ing will it be to see the noble lord and the right honourable gentleman, after a conference in cabinet on the convulsed state of the country, or other *arcana imperii*, part company at the end of Downing-street, each to carry on his separate system of agitation ! Great indeed will be the vigour of your administration, and cordial the concert of your cabinet !

“ But suppose you abstain from agitation ; suppose, in order to prevent collision in the cabinet, you never discuss either corn-laws or ballot, or any other of the open questions, what answer will you make to your constituents at Edinburgh ? Out of office, you declared yourself in favour of these measures,—in office, you repeated the assurance that you were faithful to your principles. From the proud Keep of Windsor you proclaimed your fidelity to them, not from the gratification of any vulgar personal vanity, but from the firm resolution that truth should be spoken in high places, and that from the palace of kings the comfortable tidings of radical reform should be conveyed by a voice of authority.

“ The noble lord (John Russell) tells his constituents at Stroud, that the measures to be dreaded, as ending in revolution, are—the ballot and its consequence, indefinitely extended suffrage ; and he exhorts the inhabitants of Stroud to act on the principles of true Whiggism, and, above all, ‘not to raise the anchors of the monarchy while a storm is blackening in the horizon.’ And what does the noble lord do, as the fury of the storm increases ? He enlists an able-bodied seaman, who thinks there is no safety from the storm but in heaving the anchors—and is whistling away, with half the crew at work at the capstan. And what is the consequence ? The vessel is lost, while the officers are squabbling and fighting about the management of it. One insists on remaining at anchor, and riding out the storm ; the other, on heaving the anchor, and braving the open sea : neither has strength

enough to prevail ; and, amid the distractions of the crew, the gallant ship drags along with imperfect and loosened holding, till she drifts on the obscure and dirty mud-bank of progressive reform.”

Having at great length denounced the policy of the ministers, Sir Robert Peel next proceeded to explain the course which he would himself pursue, if invited to take office. He prefaced this part of his speech with the following observations :

“ It is said that I cannot venture to declare an opinion on important matters, without at once exhibiting the divisions and dissensions which are alleged to prevail in the Conservative party. But I declare, once for all, that I prefer incurring that danger, to the purchasing of a precarious support by the concealment of my views and intentions. I ask no man to relinquish his own conscientious convictions in order that he may adopt mine ; but, on the other hand, I will not be the instrument for giving effect to opinions in which I do not concur, and no man shall have a right to upbraid me for having acquired his confidence by a pretended acquiescence in his views, or by a reserve liable to misconstruction.”

Having stated, at great length, his opinions on Privilege—Poor Laws—National Education—and Progressive Reform, he repeated his protest, of the preceding year, against any change in the Corn Laws :

“ I did not then profess,” said he, “ nor do I now profess, an unchangeable adherence to the details of the existing law—a positive refusal, under any circumstance, to alter any figure of the scale which regulates the duty on foreign corn. I did profess, and I now repeat—that I consider a liberal protection to domestic agriculture, indispensable, not merely to the prosperity of agriculture, but to the general interests of the community—that I think a graduated duty, varying inversely with the price of corn, far preferable to a fixed duty—

that I object to a fixed duty, first, from the great difficulty of determining the proper amount of it on any satisfactory data ; but, secondly, and chiefly, because I foresee that it would be impossible to maintain that fixed duty under a very high price of corn, and that, once withdrawn, it would be extremely difficult to re-establish it."

In reply to the assertion that he might be forced by his followers to recal the Emancipation act of 1829, he said, "Is there any man living who has greater interest than I have in maintaining that bill, or who ought to view with greater pain, obstacles to its satisfactory and conciliatory operation? Can it be justly required from me to contradict every newspaper report, to disclaim the speech of some utter stranger to me or my opinions, who may choose to declare his belief that I repent of the part I took in the passing of the Relief bill? Repent, indeed! My repentance must either be from conviction that my motives were dishonest or corrupt, or that the course I took in 1829 was justified by no considerations of necessity or true policy. As to motives, I may say, without presumption, that I can claim credit for one virtuous act in public life. I can claim credit for having incurred, in the performance of a public duty from which I might have shrunk, not merely obloquy and vituperation, but the heavier sacrifices of the alienation of private friends, the severance of party connections, the interruption of yet nearer and more binding ties. I say nothing of the loss of power. I look with scorn and contempt on the insinuations that, having opposed Catholic Emancipation while it was profitable to oppose it, I became a convert for the sake of retaining office. Who could doubt that the certain consequence of my proposing the Relief bill must be that which actually followed — the loss of the support of those with whom I had heretofore acted, and the inability to conduct the government ?

"The right honourable gentleman prophesies a speedy renewal of those feelings of dissatisfaction, (disgust, indeed, was the word he used,) with which the Tory party viewed the course which my noble friend, the Duke of Wellington, and myself felt it our duty to pursue in regard to the Relief bill. I do not deny the existenee of those feelings at that time. They were prompted, I believe, and not unnaturally, less by the deeision to whieh we came, than by the eircumstances under whieh it was our painful duty to act—the apparent reserve which we maintained until the last moment—the apparent distrust of those with whom we had previously cordially eo-operated in publie life. The events of those days are now becoiming matters of history; and I have been supported, through all the reproaehes I have endured, and the sacrificees I have made, by the conviction that justice must be ultimately done, and that the light of truth will at last dispel every mist, every shade on our character, that imperfect knowledge and unjust suspieion may have thrown."

His exposition of his views respecting Ireland, and his peroration, must be given complete, for they have a historical as well as a personal importanee :—

"Then comes the question—If the Relief bill cannot be repealed, in what spirit shall it be executed? Shall it be nominally retained on the statute book, but be defeated, so far as civil office and distinctions are concerned, through the distrust of the crown? I answer, Decidedly not. And is this answer now extorted from me for the first time? Is it true that I have eountenaneed, by silenee, an opposite opinion? What could be more explicit than the declararation which I made—not in paragraphs of newspapers, but in my place in parliament, in the month of April of last year?

"I then observed, 'As the law has decreed a civil equality to all classes in Ireland, without reference to religious distinctions, the crown ought not, by the interposition of its

prerogative, to create practically a difference which the law does not recognize. I think the crown ought to act on the principle of the law, and not make the religious opinions entertained by any man, the ground of disqualification for the exercise of civil functions.' I then claimed for myself what I now claim—the same right which you exercise, and which every government ought to exercise—that of preferring its own friends and supporters to such appointments as imply mutual trust and confidence, and which could not be usefully filled for the public service without a concurrence in political opinions. But I added, 'I have never taunted the noble lord with selecting Roman Catholics for such appointments. I defy him to produce the instance in which I have sought thus to limit him in the exercise of his patronage.'

"I adhere to these opinions; and having avowed them, not once, but repeatedly, in parliament, I consider myself relieved from the necessity of recording them, during the recess, in letters to newspapers or speeches after dinner. I readily subscribe to the position that the crown ought to act on the great principle of the law; but, in fully recognizing the principle of civil equality as the rule of action for the crown, I beg distinctly to declare that I consider it an abuse and perversion of that rule, to patronize agitators *because* they are Roman Catholics. I would place Roman Catholics, in this respect, on a footing of equality with Protestants; and, as I would withhold grace and favour from the Protestant agitator, so would I, without hesitation, withhold them from the Roman Catholic.

"There is but one qualification which I would place on the principle of civil equality, and that is, a qualification distinctly recognized by the law, recognized by every advocate of the Roman Catholic claims, recognized and fully assented to by the Roman Catholics themselves. It is this, that, concurrently with the enjoyment of civil privilege by

the Roman Catholics, the Protestant Church shall be inviolably maintained as the Established Church, and protected in the possession of its rights and privileges as such. The respected authority of Mr. Grattan was decisive and unvarying in favour of the maintenance of this principle; every bill which Mr. Grattan brought in for the relief of the Roman Catholics, recited, almost ostentatiously, in its preamble, the absolute right of the Established Church to protection; his dying declarations were in favour of the combined principle of civil equality and the maintenance of the established religion in Ireland as well as in this country. I will conciliate no support by the concession or compromise of that principle.

“I am accused, however, of having acted, in respect to the administration of Ireland, on a different system from that which I profess. I have had but a brief connection with the government of Ireland since the passing of the Relief bill, but is it just to draw an unfavourable inference from the experience of that connection? In 1835 I was called upon to constitute a government for Ireland. Of whom was it composed? Of Lord Haddington, as Lord-Lieutenant, an uniform and able supporter of the Roman Catholic claims, and the intimate friend of Mr. Canning; of Sir Henry Hardinge, as Chief Secretary, the friend and relation of the late Lord Londonderry. For the office of Lord Chancellor I selected the chief ornament of the bar of England, a man conspicuous for the mildness and moderation of his opinions, who, in the course of his short career in Ireland, conciliated the esteem and respect of the bar in that country, and the warm approbation of his political opponents. My Attorney-General had been the Attorney-General of Lord Melbourne; my Under-Secretary of State had been his; my Solicitor-General was Mr. Pennefather—and can any man hear the mention of that name without admitting its claim to honour

and respect? What better indications could I give of the intention to govern Ireland with justice, with impartiality, and with kindness, than such appointments as those to the chief offices that constituted the government? You complain of the injustice and absurdity of condemning the existing government of Ireland for trivial acts, such for instance as the invitation of Mr. O'Connell to the table of the Lord-Lieutenant. Did you extend that forbearance to Lord Haddington's government? Is it not the fact, that the chief, almost the only accusation that you could find to prefer against him, was, that some vagabond waved an orange flag in a Dublin theatre over the box of the Lord-Lieutenant? Do I make light of the studied exhibition of a flag, if intended as an insult? No; but I complain of the grievous injustice of making Lord Haddington responsible for an act of which he was utterly unconscious, and which he was the first to reprobate.

"I have done. I have fulfilled the purpose for which I rose, by specifying the grounds on which I withhold my confidence from the present government, and by declaring the course I mean to pursue on the great questions of public policy on which the public mind is divided. I cannot answer the question you put to me, 'What principles will prevail, if a new government be formed?'—but I can answer for it, that if the principles I profess do not prevail, of that government I shall form no part. It may be, that by the avowal of my opinions I shall forfeit the confidence of some who, under mistaken impressions, may have been hitherto disposed to follow me. I shall deeply regret the withdrawal of that confidence; but I would infinitely prefer to incur the penalty of its withdrawal, than to retain it under false pretences, or under misapprehensions which silence on my part might confirm.

"It may be, that the principles I profess cannot be reduced

to practise, and that a government attempting the execution of them would not meet with adequate support from the House of Commons: still I shall not abandon them. I shall not seek to compensate the threatened loss of confidence on this side of the House, by the faintest effort to conciliate the support of the other. I shall steadily persevere in the course which I have uniformly pursued since the passing of the Reform bill—content with the substantial power which I shall yet exercise—indifferent as to office, so far as personal feelings or personal objects are concerned—ready, if required, to undertake it, whatever be its difficulties—refusing to accept it on conditions inconsistent with personal honour—disdaining to hold it by the tenure by which it is at present held.

“Every stimulus to continued exertion will remain. Every distinction that my ambition aspires to will be gained. I shall have the cordial co-operation of many friends whom I honour and esteem, and with whom I have acted from my first entrance into the troubled career of political life; with those friends also, not less honoured and esteemed, who, having made the noblest sacrifices of power and political connection to public principle, have been united with me by an overpowering sense of public duty.

“Above all other encouragements, above all other distinctions, I shall have the proud satisfaction of acting in entire and cordial concert with that illustrious man on whose right hand I have stood throughout the varying fortunes of the great contests of recent years, who is still devoting faculties, unimpaired by time, to the service of a grateful country, and achieving a reputation as a statesman not inferior to his pre-eminent fame as a warrior, through the exercise of the same qualities, ‘rare in their separate excellence, wonderful in their combination,’ which ensured his military triumphs; the same acuteness, the same sagacity

the same patience, the same true courage, the love of justice, the love of truth, the noble simplicity of mind without fear and without reproach.

“Encouraged by such an example and supported by such aid; holding opinions which I believe to be the opinions of the vast majority of those intelligent and powerful classes which used to influence and which ought to influence the constitution and the march of governments—the clergy the magistracy, the commercial classes, the yeomanry of this country—I can hardly believe that such opinions are incapable of practical execution. But be that as it may, of this I am sure, that they must so far prevail, that he who holds them will be enabled effectually to assist you (the government) whenever you resolve to refuse improper and dangerous concessions; and, if you are inclined to make them, to offer those impediments to your downward progress, which you will call obstructions to public business—which the country will consider the real guarantee that this free and limited monarchy shall not be converted, through the folly or the weakness of its rulers, into an unqualified and unmitigated democracy.”

Lord John Russell closed this long debate in a speech of great power and ability, enumerating all the measures which had been brought forward by the Whig ministry, most of which have been enumerated in the preceding pages.—The motion was rejected by a majority of twenty-one.

Various disputes respecting the opium trade had led to serious collisions between the English merchants and the Chinese authorities in Canton. These officials, long accustomed to treat all foreigners as barbarians, had proceeded to such lengths, and had offered such wanton insults to the British representatives, that war had become inevitable. Sir James Graham threw the blame of these dissensions on the cabinet, and moved a vote of censure on the policy

pursued towards China. The debate was principally remarkable for Mr. Gladstone's imprudent approbation of the poisoning of the wells by the Chinese, as a means of expelling the English from their empire. This atrocious sentiment was almost universally reprobated, and was tacitly condemned by Sir Robert Peel, who insisted that war, if undertaken, should be vigorously and efficiently pursued. On this occasion, the ministerial majority was reduced to nine.

The long-disputed measure for reforming the Irish corporations was allowed to pass into a law ; but a new subject, the Registration of Voters in Ireland, was introduced by Lord Stanley, and it revived all the heats and animosities of the Irish party. Lord Stanley's bill would have virtually disfranchised the great body of the Irish people ; it was framed in a deliberate spirit of hostility and insult ; it was nothing better than a dangerous weapon of faction, for, though its author pressed it forward with all his characteristic vehemence while in opposition, he allowed it to sink quietly into oblivion so soon as he had obtained office. During the fierce discussions provoked by Lord Stanley, the ministerial measures for settling the government of Canada, and for modifying the distribution of ecclesiastical revenues in England, passed with little observation and less opposition. Neither did the falling condition of the revenue excite all the attention which its importance deserved ; the Whigs had not the strength to carry, even if they had the courage to propose, such a revision of the system of taxation, as might have increased the national income without adding to the financial pressure on the productive industry of the country.

England, bound by treaty to Turkey, could not look on patiently, while the very existence of that empire was endangered by Mohammed Ali. On the other hand, France was inclined to favour the Pacha of Egypt, and its emissaries secretly prompted him to reject the remonstrances addressed

to him by the European powers. Lord Palmerston displayed at this crisis a vigour and promptitude which excited universal admiration. He sent a squadron to the coast of Syria, which promptly took possession of Beyrouth. Aere was then stormed by the gallant Commodore (now Admiral) Napier, and this exploit produced such an effect, that the Syrian tribes, which had been disposed to favour the Egyptians, returned to their allegiance, and Mohammed Ali consented to a convention which provided for his immediately removing his troops from Asiatic Turkey.

Party spirit was hardly ever more calm than when parliament assembled in 1841; every one knew that the Whig government was tottering to its fall, but no one could predict the precise date of its dissolution. The Conservatives generally were eager to return to power, but the more shrewd of their leaders saw difficulties and complications in the aspect of affairs, which led them to court delay, and to leave as much as possible the arrangement of these perplexities to their adversaries. Among these was the renewal of the powers given to the Central Commission under the New Poor Law, for, though Sir Robert Peel and his immediate followers continued to support the system as eagerly as the ministers themselves, the Whigs had to bear the whole odium of its unpopularity. The Registration of Voters in Ireland was a difficulty created by Lord Stanley; it formed the subject of many long and furious debates during the session, which had no other effect than to increase the acrimony of parties in England, and greatly to strengthen the cause of Repeal in Ireland.

But the interest of these, and almost all other political questions, was speedily absorbed by the announcement, that ministers had resolved to propose a most important modification of the Corn Laws, and of the differential duties imposed on foreign sugar and timber. An association had been

formed by the great northern manufacturers, which subsequently took the name of the Anti-Corn-Law League, to obtain a repeal of those laws, which were found to produce a most injurious effect on the trade and commerce of the country. The council of the League was established in Manchester, from thence able lecturers were sent out, and clever tracts distributed, which forcibly directed the attention of the public to the injurious effect of these laws, and to the great national advantages which would result from the establishment of Free-Trade. On the other side, the monopolists were not idle, meetings were convened of parties connected with the shipping and North American interests—of the planters, merchants, and others, interested in the West Indian colonies—of the representatives of East Indian property—of the societies for the abolition of slavery, whose alarms were excited at the prospect of the impulse which a reduction of the sugar duties would give to slavery in Cuba and Brazil; and measures were taken for promoting a union of all those powerful parties with the agricultural body, to resist the blow threatened against their various interests by the government.

The Anti-Corn-Law League was, at this time, still in its infancy; the name of Cobden was scarcely known beyond the precincts of Manchester; and though the Hon. C. P. Villiers had more than once demolished every argument by which monopoly was supported, the nation was slow in apprehending that free-trade, instead of being an abstract question of economic science, was really a measure deeply affecting the most vital and material interests of the community. Moreover, the changes projected by the ministry had, from the peculiar circumstances under which they were proposed, too much the character and appearance of temporary expedients brought forward to serve the purpose, and stay the fall, of a party; want of faith in the sincerity of those who proposed

to carry the doctrines of free-trade into effect, prevented any active co-operation on the part of many ardent advocates of these doctrines, not otherwise interested in supporting the government. Thus when the first great battle was to be fought, the monopolists were ardent and united, while the great body of the nation was quiescent and apathetic.

Lord Sandon (since Earl of Harrowby) took the lead against the ministry, and judiciously chose the sugar duties as his field of battle. He gave notice of the following resolution, to be moved on the House going into a committee on ways and means : “That, considering the efforts and sacrifices which parliament and the country have made for the abolition of the slave-trade and slavery, with the earnest hope that their exertions and example might lead to a mitigation and final extinction of those evils in other countries, this House is not prepared (especially with the present prospect of the supply of sugar from the British possessions) to adopt the measure proposed by her Majesty’s government, for the reduction of the duty on foreign sugars.”

The counter-resolution proposed by Lord John Russell was, “That it is the opinion of this House, that it is practicable, to supply the present inadequacy of the revenue, to meet the expenditure of the country, by a judicious alteration of protective and differential duties, without any material increase of the public burdens ; that such course will, at the same time, promote the interests of trade, and afford relief to the industrious classes, and is best calculated to provide for the maintenance of the public faith, and the general welfare of the people.” Before the discussion began, Lord John Russell stated the scale of fixed duties on the importation of corn, which he intended to propose as a substitute for the sliding scale.

The debate commenced on the 7th of May, and was continued for eight nights. We shall only notice the speeches of Lord John Russell and Sir Robert Peel. Lord John Russell sharply exposed the pretended humanity which called for the continuance of differential duties on slave-grown sugar. He showed that we consumed cotton, coffee, and tobacco, the produce of slave labour; nay, more, the slave-grown sugar, after having been refined in bond, was very largely consumed by the West India planters themselves. But he dwelt most strongly on the effect, that the decision of the British parliament on the adoption of the alternative between the policy of monopoly or of free-trade, would have on foreign nations. "If," said he, "they see that this great country, this free country, has come to an opinion that restriction and prohibition are the best maxims of commercial policy, they will quote that example for themselves. Their merchants will quote it, too, and restriction and prohibition will become the rule of intercourse of European nations. Is that for the advantage of this country, or is it for the advantage of the world? I say, that for the former it certainly is not; for, as a great commercial and manufacturing nation, we ought to look to the extension and diffusion of British manufactures. I say, also, that for the advantage of the world it certainly is not; because my belief is, that the more there is a free and unrestricted intercourse, the more the nations of the world are mingled together by those ties of peaceful commerce, the more this country will be carrying, with her bales of goods and cases of hardware, the knowledge of civilization and Christianity of a country that stands in the front for all these qualities; and the House must observe, that though this nation stands in so proud and eminent a position, yet a pernicious example set by her in this respect, which may be of some disadvantage to others, must finally be

of the utmost disadvantage to herself. She does not stand, like imperial Rome, the conqueror of the world—

‘But, Rome, ’tis thine alone, with awful sway,  
To rule mankind and make the world obey,  
Disposing peace and war thy own majestic way.  
To tame the proud, the fetter’d slave to free,  
These are imperial arts, and worthy thee.’

She is in Europe one amongst several nations of great power and great civilization, of whose institutions some are equally as free as her own; many of them advancing to great wealth, and competing with, and rivalling her in all the arts of peace, and in all her productions. Let her then give to these nations a bright example, and she will still be not only even, but the foremost. But let her take a contrary course, and establish restriction and prohibition—let her say to other nations, that her merchants of the West Indies and East Indies, the timber-merchants of North America, and the land-owners of her own soil, have a present monopoly, that *that* is her standard, and under that standard she means to march on, and by it to abide; she will then set an evil example, that before long will become confirmed, and when she wishes to retrace her steps, she will find the lesson she has taught too deeply implanted ever to be eradicated. Having those views of the state of the country, and of the other countries of the globe in communion with it, my colleagues and I, as it was our bounden duty to do, have given our advice to our sovereign; the result of that advice I have now produced before the House, and with you it rests to come to a decision on the subject. If you adopt the plan which the government has proposed, I look forward with confidence to an era of prosperity. If, however, you do not adopt it, on this House will be the responsibility of rejecting the measure, while her Majesty’s ministers will have discharged the duty that

is incumbent on them—that of not having concealed their opinion, and having done their best for the service of their country.” The noble lord then moved that the Speaker do leave the chair.

Sir Robert Peel did not rise until near the conclusion of the debate; great interest was attached to his speech, as an exposition of the policy he would pursue on his advent to office, of which there was now no very distant prospect; but we shall only notice those points which were not anticipated in his speech on Sir John Yarde Buller’s motion. Referring to the terms of Lord Sandon’s motion, he said, “I will be frank and explicit with you. I do now say that my opinion, my deliberate opinion, is, that the great experiment which has cost the country so much—the great experiment for the extinction of slavery—should be fully, fairly, and perfectly tried; and that for this object we ought to encourage sugar, the production of free labour, by giving it the exclusive preference in the markets of the United Kingdom, as well as by endeavouring to increase its supply in all our colonies. Sir, if I had been in office, I should have taken the same course that I do take on this question; and if I shall be in office, I never contemplate reversing it.” Then turning in a very marked and significant manner to Lord John Russell, he continued, “I do not propose to follow your example, to resist the proposition now under discussion, this year, and come down the next with a motion for its adoption. Sir, the principle that we contend for, is this, that East India sugar and rum—all produce of that colony in fact, but especially sugars—shall be placed on the same footing as the produce of the West Indies. My confident hope and firm belief is, that a sufficient supply of sugar will be produced in our own colonies. I shall rejoice at it; and if it be procurable at a reasonable price, I shall be prepared to continue the

existing protection so long as our West Indian colonies remain in a state analogous to that in which they are placed at present."

Proceeding to the Corn Laws, he announced his determination on that subject in terms so strong, that, at the risk of a little repetition, we must insert them: "I say, that notwithstanding the formidable combination which has been formed against the Corn Laws—notwithstanding the declarations that either the total repeal, or the substitution of a fixed duty for the present scale, is the inevitable result of the agitation now going forward—notwithstanding this declaration, I do not hesitate to avow my adherence to the opinion which I expressed last year, and now again declare, that my preference is decidedly in favour of a graduated scale, rather than any fixed duty. I will not limit myself to any rigid details, but I reserve for myself the opportunity of considering them. The noble lord will propose the principle of a fixed duty, but I will offer my opposition to it on the ground that I do not think a fixed duty can be permanent."

Adverting to the state of the finances, he thus continued in a tone of taunting asperity—"I am by no means surprised at your confidence. You recollect that when I left office in 1830, I had been connected with an administration, which, during the period in which it had the management of the finances, reduced the public debt by twenty millions of capital, and the annual charge of that debt by more than one million. You remember, too, that we left a surplus of one million and a half of revenue over expenditure, and that we did this with all the difficulties of an unreformed parliament. Now, you have had your way for five years. You have had all the benefit of cheap government. You have had that superior advantage—you have had the administration of affairs for ten years. You recollect no doubt the aid

which I gave you with respect to the Jamaica question on a former occasion—when I enabled you to retain popular representative government—when you were compelled to take my advice, and were glad, and rejoiced in your counsellor—you remember all this; and if the circumstances were the same now, I would again give you the same advice. Sir, I cannot but confess that I view with unaffected sympathy, the position of the right honourable gentleman, the Chancellor of the Exchequer—for ‘to see a good man struggling with adversity,’ says the poet, ‘is a sight which the gods love to look upon’—and I cannot conceive a more lamentable position than that of a Chancellor of the Exchequer, seated on an empty chest, by the side of bottomless deficiencies, fishing for a budget. *I won’t bite;* and I refuse my aid on this ground, that I can see nothing less worthy of public confidence than my conduct would be, were I, out of office, to come forward and offer my budget in competition with yours.”

In conclusion, he assailed the ministers for their tenacity of office, in these terms—“Sir, I cannot think it is to the advantage of the monarchy, that the servants of the crown should be retained, when they are unable to carry those measures which, as the confidential servants of the sovereign, it is their bounden duty to bring forward. It is not the measures themselves, which you (*turning to the ministers*) introduce, that are injurious, but they lose grace and favour in the public eye, when it is believed that they do not spring from your deliberate will, are not formed in consequence of the deliberate conviction of your own minds, but are proposed merely for the purpose of propping up your fallen fortunes, and conciliating the will of a particular party to whose support you look. It is not, believe me, consistent with your own high character as public men, that you have made your present proposal. The public—I do not mean

the needy and suffering portion of the public, whose miseries you have affected to describe, but the intelligent, well-judging portion of the public—will hardly admit that you possess their confidence.”

Lord John Russell made a short speech in reply, and the House then divided on his motion that the Speaker do leave the chair, when there appeared for the motion, 281, against it, 317; leaving ministers in a minority of thirty-six.

Ministers did not resign; Lord John Russell, on the contrary, declared his intention to bring forward the Corn Laws on the 4th of June, obviously desiring to lay a full exposition of the ministerial policy before the country, and then to dissolve parliament. Sir Robert Peel resolved to frustrate this policy, and he gave notice that on the 27th of May he would renew Sir John Yarde Buller’s motion for a vote of want of confidence in ministers. He brought forward the resolution on the appointed day, when, after a very stormy and protracted, but rather uninteresting debate, there appeared for Sir Robert Peel’s resolution 312, against it 311, leaving the ministry in a minority of one.

Lord Melbourne’s administration was now virtually at an end. Recourse, indeed, was had to a dissolution of parliament; but it was easy to see that all the varied interests of the great monopolists being banded against the cabinet, while the nation, and even the Free Traders, manifested no enthusiasm in their favour, the new parliament was likely to be even more hostile than that which had just pronounced the condemnation of the government.

## CHAPTER V.

## FORMATION AND EARLY CAREER OF THE PEEL MINISTRY.

THE dissolution of parliament having taken place, the two great parties in the State, known as Liberals and Conservatives, prepared themselves for the struggle which was to ensue at the general election. But the hopes and expectations on the two sides were widely different. Great defections from the Liberal party had taken place; many had been alienated by the intemperate violence of O'Connell and his followers; others had become alarmed for the safety of the Established Church, which they believed to be menaced by the Radical supporters of the ministry; and a still larger number, including several old Whigs, thought the exigencies of the country required a strong and efficient government, and that such could only be formed by the Conservatives. Even among the adherents of the Liberal party who remained firm to the cause, there were many symptoms of distrust and disunion: some blamed the Whigs for having stopped short in their course of progressive reform; others were opposed to them on the question of the New Poor Law; and a still greater number believed that the exigencies of the times required a strong and efficient government, and that such could only be formed by the Conservative leaders.

On the other hand, the whole landed interest of the country, including both proprietors and farmers, united with the Conservatives in resisting any diminution of the protection supposed to be afforded to the agricultural interest by the Corn Laws; the West India merchants and proprietors

were equally on the alert to defend the protection granted to Colonial sugars ; and the Canadian interest was stimulated to defend the preference given to Colonial timber. Thus, on the one side was displayed all the apathy arising from disappointment, whilst on the other all the energies were excited likely to be put in action by private and pecuniary interest. Free-Trade was as yet little better than an abstract idea, held by philosophers, and hardly appreciated by the people, while monopoly was a profitable reality, for which those who gained by it were ready not only to struggle, but to make considerable sacrifices.

One of the most interesting struggles was that for the city of London, where Lord John Russell himself was a candidate for the suffrages of the electors. Four Liberals had been returned to the preceding parliament, but in the present struggle two Conservatives and two Liberals were returned, Mr. Masterman, one of the former, being at the head of the poll, and Lord John Russell at the bottom, with a majority only of seven above the third Conservative candidate. In Westminster, which had always been considered the great stronghold of the Liberals, Sir De Lacy Evans was defeated by the Conservative candidate, Captain Rous ; and Mr. O'Connell was ousted from the representation of the city of Dublin. In the counties, the triumph of the Conservatives was complete : they unseated Lord Howick in Northumberland, and Lord Morpeth in the West Riding of Yorkshire ; in fact, out of one hundred and fifty-nine representatives of English counties, only twenty-three belonged to the Liberal party. Upon the whole returns, the result was more favourable to the Conservative cause than had been anticipated by the most sanguine of the party ; and it seemed certain that Sir Robert Peel would command a stronger and more efficient majority than had supported any minister in parliament

for a very long period, hardly excepting that of Earl Grey in the first reformed parliament.

The Whigs were well aware that the term of their official existence could not be protracted beyond the first week after the assembling of the new parliament; they prepared to retire with dignity, and they inserted in the Queen's speech a manly exposition of the policy which they had resolved to pursue, had they continued in office. The Lords Commissioners, who delivered the royal speech, declared—

“ We are more especially commanded to declare to you, that the extraordinary expenses which the events in Canada, China, and the Mediterranean have occasioned, and the necessity of maintaining a force adequate to the protection of our extensive possessions, have made it necessary to consider the means of increasing the public revenue. Her Majesty is anxious that this object should be effected in the manner least burdensome to her people; and it has appeared to her Majesty, after full deliberation, that you may, at this juncture, properly direct your attention to the revision of duties affecting the productions of foreign countries. It will be for you to consider whether some of those duties are not so trifling in amount, as to be unproductive to the revenue, while they are vexatious to commerce. You may further examine whether the principle of protection upon which others of those duties are founded, be not carried to an extent injurious alike to the income of the state and the interests of the people.

“ Her Majesty is desirous that you should consider the laws which regulate the trade in corn. It will be for you to determine whether these laws do not aggravate the natural fluctuations of supply—whether they do not embarrass trade, derange the currency, and, by their operation, diminish the

comfort and increase the privations of the great body of the community.

"Her Majesty, feeling the deepest sympathy with those of her subjects who are now suffering from distress and want of employment, it is her earnest prayer that all your deliberations may be guided by wisdom, and may conduce to the happiness of her beloved people."

Such a speech was obviously calculated to provoke a hostile amendment on the address. Such an amendment was accordingly proposed in both Houses. It was—"Humbly to represent to her Majesty, that we observe, with great concern, that the public expenditure has, of late, in each of several successive years, exceeded the annual income; and that we are convinced of the necessity of adopting measures for the purpose of remedying so great an evil: To assure her Majesty that we are deeply sensible of the importance of those considerations to which her Majesty has been graciously pleased to direct our attention, in reference to the revenue and commerce of the country, and to the laws which regulate the trade in corn: That on deciding the course which it may be desirable to pursue in such matters, it will be our earnest desire to consult the interest and promote the welfare of all classes of her Majesty's subjects: That we feel it, however, to be our duty humbly to submit to her Majesty, that it is essential to the satisfactory results of our deliberations upon these and other matters of public concern, that her Majesty's government should possess the confidence of the House and of the country; and respectfully to represent to her Majesty, that that confidence is not reposed in the present advisers of her Majesty: To assure her Majesty that, in the gracious expression of her Majesty's deep sympathy with those of her subjects who are now suffering from distress and want of employment, we recognize an additional proof of her Majesty's tender regard for the welfare of her subjects; and that we

cordially join in the prayer of her Majesty, that all our deliberations may be guided by wisdom, and may conduce to the happiness of her people."

This amendment was carried against the Whig ministers in the Upper House by a majority of seventy-two; but as they had always been in a minority in the Lords, this result had been anticipated, and excited but little attention.

In the House of Commons, the address having been moved by Mr. Mark Phillips, the member for Manchester, and the chosen representative of the manufacturing interests, the proposing of the amendment was confided to Mr. J. S. Wortley, who had succeeded Lord Morpeth in the representation of the West Riding of Yorkshire. The debate continued during four nights, and was supported with unusual spirit and animation. It was on this occasion, that Mr. Richard Cobden, who had been returned for the borough of Stockport, first addressed the House; he described in simple, but strong terms, the cruel operation of the Corn-Laws on the trade of the manufacturers, and the condition of the operative population; his address produced a deeper impression than could have resulted from mere eloquence, for every sentence showed earnestness of conviction and thorough knowledge of the subject. Mr. Villiers also exposed the ordinary fallacies of protection with very happy effect, and endeavoured to turn the debate from the mere party-considerations on which those who took part in it chiefly dwelt; and O'Connell delivered a most powerful, though, in some passages, rather an intemperate harangue on the dangers to which Ireland would be exposed by the advent of a Tory government.

The two most interesting speeches, however, delivered in this long debate, were those of Sir Robert Peel and Lord John Russell; the former now standing on the threshold of office, the latter addressing his last words to the House as

a minister of the Crown. Sir Robert Peel began by reprobating the violent language used by O'Connell; he then referred to the state of foreign affairs, especially the dispute between England and France on the Syrian question, and said—

“ Is not the time come, when the powerful countries of Europe should reduce those military armaments which they have so sedulously raised? Is not the time come, when they should be prepared to declare that there is no use in such overgrown establishments. What is the advantage of one power greatly increasing its army or navy? Does it not see, that if it possesses such increase for self-protection and defence, the other powers would follow its example? The consequence of this state of things must be, that no increase of relative strength will accrue to any one power, but there must be a universal consumption of the resources of every country, in military preparations. They are, in fact, depriving peace of half its advantages, and anticipating the energies of war whenever they may be required. I do not mean to advocate any romantic notion of each nation trusting with security the professions of its neighbour; but if each country were to commune with itself, and ask, ‘What is at present the danger of foreign invasion compared to the danger of producing dissatisfaction and discontent, and curtailing the comforts of the people by undue taxation?’ the answer must be this, that the danger of aggression is infinitely less than the danger of those sufferings to which the present exorbitant expenditure must give rise. The interest of Europe is not that any one country should exercise a peculiar influence, but the true interest of Europe is to come to some one common accord, so as to enable every country to reduce those military armaments which belong to a state of war rather than of peace. I do wish that the councils of every country

(or that the public voice and mind, if the councils did not,) would willingly propagate such a doctrine."

In reference to the Corn Laws, he thus referred to the language which he had used before the dissolution: "I said, that, on consideration, I had formed an opinion, which intervening consideration has not induced me to alter, that the principle of a graduated scale is preferable to that of a fixed and irrevocable duty; but I said then, and I say now—and in doing so, I repeat the language which I held in 1839—that I will not bind myself to the details of the existing law, but will reserve to myself the unfettered discretion of considering and amending that law. I hold the same language now; but if you ask me whether I bind myself to the maintenance of the existing law in its details, or if you say that that is the condition on which the agricultural interest give me their support, I say, that on *that* condition, I will not accept their support."

In reference to the expected result of the debate, the resignation of the Whig ministry, he thus expressed himself—"It is not for me to speculate what may be the result of that: others have speculated upon it. I contemplate with calmness, without anxiety, nay, with confidence, whatever may be the result. If power do not devolve upon me, I shall make no complaint. If power do devolve upon me, I shall accept it with the consciousness that I have gained it by direct and constitutional means, and that I owe it to the voice of the people of this country and the favour of the sovereign. I am told, that in the exercise of that power, I must be the instrument of maintaining opinions and feelings which I myself am disposed to repudiate. With my views of government—with my views of the obligations which it imposes, the duties which it entails, the sacrifices which it involves—I am little disposed to add to those sacrifices by accepting with it a degrading and a dishonour

able station. I am told, that I must necessarily be the instrument of effecting objects in Ireland which I myself disapprove. I am asked whether I dare affront my associates and partisans. The honourable member for Meath, (Mr. H. Grattan,) has alluded to the conduct of a public functionary in Ireland, who, he said, had offered an insult to the religious feelings of his countrymen, by some public act of an offensive nature. I am not afraid of expressing my opinion with respect to acts like this; and I say at once, that there is no man in this House—no Roman Catholic member in this House—who heard with deeper pain or deeper regret than I did, that a gratuitous, an unprovoked, and an unnecessary insult had been offered to the religious feelings of the people of Ireland. If I cannot gain power or retain it, except by encouraging and favouring such feelings, I say at once, that the day on which I relinquish power, rather than defer to such feelings, will be ten times a prouder one than the day on which I obtained it. If I do accept office, it shall be by no intrigue, it shall be by no unworthy concession of constitutional principle; it shall be by no unnatural and factious combination with men (honest though I believe them to be,) entertaining extreme opinions from which I dissent. If I accept office, it shall be by walking in the open light and in the direct paths of the constitution. If I exercise power, it shall be upon *my* conception — perhaps imperfect, perhaps mistaken, but my sincere conception—of public duty. That power I will not hold, unless I can hold it consistently with the maintenance of my own opinions; and that power I will relinquish the moment I am satisfied that I am not supported in the maintenance of them by the confidence of this House and the people of this country.”

From Lord John Russell's speech we shall only take the concluding paragraph. “I am convinced,” he said, “that if

this country is governed by enlarged and liberal councils, that its power and might will spread and increase, and its influence will become greater and greater, and liberal principles will prevail, and civilization will be spread to all parts of the globe, and you will bless millions by your acts, and mankind by your union."

A division then took place, and the result was as follows :

For the Whig ministerial address .....	269
For the amendment .....	360
Majority against the Whig ministers ... ..	91

Lord Melbourne and his colleagues immediately resigned their offices, and Sir Robert Peel received her Majesty's commands to form an administration. The event produced little excitement, for it had long been anticipated ; and less curiosity was felt about the composition of the new ministry than on any former occasion. It was known that the Earl of Ripon, Lord Stanley, Sir James Graham, and the other seceders from Earl Grey's cabinet, had long since arranged all their differences with Sir Robert Peel, and would form part of his administration. In fact, the composition of the ministry was generally foreknown ; nothing remained but the distribution of offices, which was as follows :—

#### THE CABINET.

Right Hon. Sir Robert Peel, Bart. ....	First Lord of the Treasury
Lord Lyndhurst .....	Lord Chancellor
Lord Wharncliffe .....	President of the Council
Earl of Haddington .....	First Lord of the Admiralty
* Duke of Buckingham .....	Lord Privy Seal
Right Hon. Sir James Graham, Bart....	Home Secretary
Earl of Aberdeen .....	Foreign Secretary
Lord Stanley ....	Colonial Secretary
Lord Ellenborough .....	President of the Board of Control
Right Hon. Sir Henry Hardinge .....	Secretary at War
* His Grace resigned January 31st, and was succeeded by the Duke of Buccleugh.	
† Lord Ellenborough accepted the Governor-Generalship of India, and was succeeded by Lord Fitzgerald and Vesey, October 23rd.	

Earl of Ripon .....	President of the Board of Trade
Right Hon. Henry Goulburn .....	Chancellor of the Exchequer
Right Hon. Sir E. Knatchbull, Bart....	Paymaster-General
Lord Eliot .....	Chief Secretary for Ireland
Duke of Wellington .....	(Without office).

## NOT OF THE CABINET.

Lord Lowther .....	Postmaster-General
Lord Granville Somersct .....	Chan. of the Duchy of Lancaster
Earl of Lincoln .....	First Commis. of Land Revenue
Right Hon. Sir George Murray .....	Master-General of the Ordnance
Colonel Jonathan Pecl.....	Surveyor-General of the Ordnance
Captain Boldero .....	Clerk of the Ordnance
F. R. Bonham Esq. ....	Storkeeper of the Ordnance
Right Hon. William Ewart Gladstone }	Vice - President of the Board of Trade, and Master of the Mint
J. Miles Gaskell, Esq. ....	
H. B. Baring, Esq. ....	
Alexander Pringle, Esq. ....	
J. Young, Esq. ....	
Sir G. Clerk .....	
Sir T. Fremantle .....	
Sir G. Cockburn .....	
Admiral Sir W. Gage .....	
Sir G. F. Seymour.....	
Hon. Captain Gordon .....	
Hon. H. T. L. Corry .....	
Hon. Sidney Herbert.....	Secretary of the Admiralty
Hon. J. H. T. M. Sutton.....	Home Under-Secretary
Lord Canning .....	Foreign Under-Secretary
W. G. Hope, Esq. ....	Colonial Under-Secretary
Hon. W. B. Baring .....	
J. Emerson Tennent, Esq. ....	Secretaries of the Board of Control
Sir Frederick Pollock .....	Attorney-General
Sir William Webb Follett .....	Solicitor-General
Dr. Nicholl .....	Judge Advocate
Lord Ellenborough .....	Governor-General of India
Sir C. Bagot .....	Governor-General of Canada

## IRELAND.

Earl de Grey .....	Lord Lieutenant
Sir Edward Sugden .....	Lord Chancellor
Lord Eliot .....	Chief Secretary
Right Hon. Francis Blackburne .....	Attorney-General
Edward Pennefather, Esq. .....	Solicitor-General

## SCOTLAND.

Right Hon. Sir William Rae, Bart. ....	Lord Advocate
Duncan M'Neil, Esq. ....	Solicitor-General

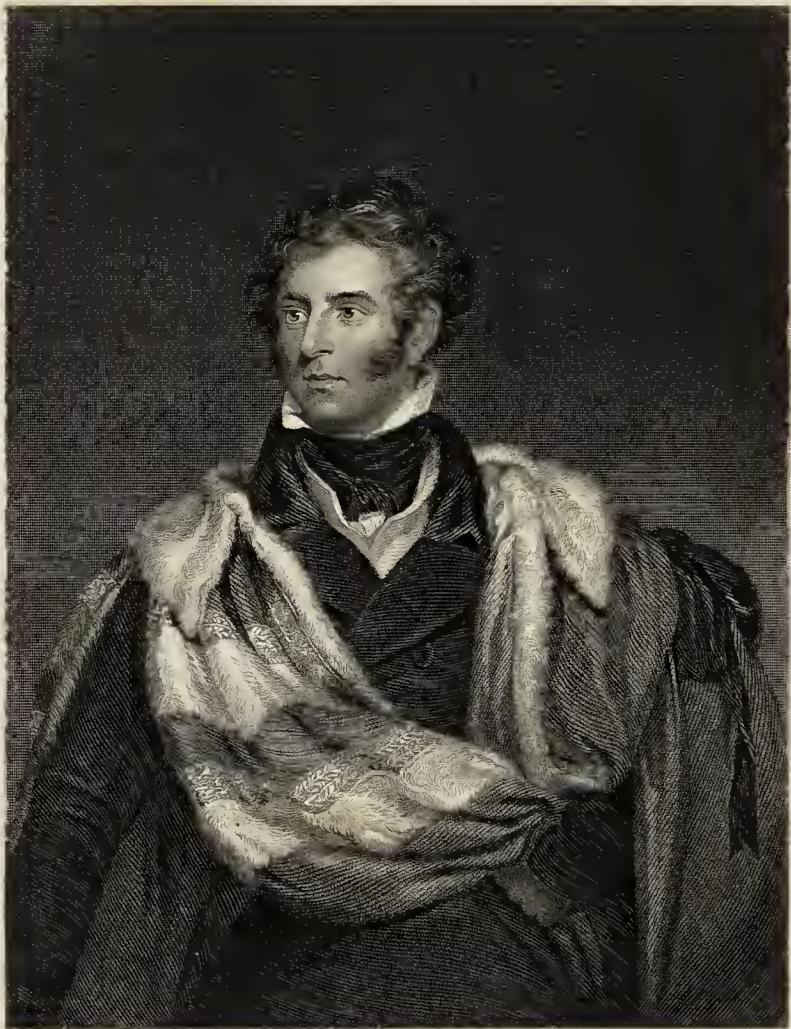
## HOUSEHOLD APPOINTMENTS.

Lord Chamberlain .....	Earl Delawar
Vice-Chamberlain .....	Lord Ernest Bruce
Mistress of the Robes .....	Duchess of Buccleugh
Lord Steward .....	Earl of Liverpool
Treasurer of the Household .....	Earl Jermyn
Comptroller of the Household .....	Col. the Right Hon. D. Damer
Captain of the Gentlemen-at-Arms .....	Lord Forrester
Captain of the Yeomen of the Guard .....	Marquess of Lothian
Master of the Horse .....	Earl of Jersey
Clerk-Marshal .....	Lord C. Wellesley
Master of the Buckhounds .....	Earl of Rosslyn.

In this list there are some names which require a little comment. The Duke of Buckingham and Sir Edward Knatchbull, being generally regarded as the representatives of the agricultural interest, their appointment to high office seemed to intimate that the cabinet was constituted on the basis of maintaining the system of protection intact. So soon then as it appeared that some modification of the sliding-scale would be attempted, the Duke of Buckingham resigned office, and the more violent portion of the Protectionist press began to insinuate doubts and suspicions of Sir Robert Peel's fidelity to their party. Messrs. Goulburn and Gladstone were deemed to be as closely identified with the colonial monopoly of sugar, as the Duke of Buckingham was with agricultural protection ; and unless for the gratification of the West India interest, it was not easy to discover why the former of these gentlemen should have been appointed Chancellor of the Exchequer, since Sir Robert Peel generally took upon himself the task of stating the ministerial plans of finance to the House of Commons.

The Earl of Ripon and Lord Canning having taken office under Sir Robert Peel, it was assumed that the friends and family of the Right Hon. George Canning had resolved to bury in oblivion all memory of the hostility which they had previously asserted to have hastened, if not to have caused, the death of that lamented statesman. Lord Palmerston





Painted by W. Robinson

Engraved by H. Robinson

THOMAS PHILIP WEDDELL ROBINSON, EARL de GREY

de Grey

CHARLES DODGSON, M.A., F.R.S.

was almost the only one of the old Canning party who still adhered to the Whigs, and he was therefore often fiercely assailed by those with whom he had acted under Canning. Earl de Grey, as brother of the Earl of Ripon, was appointed Lord-Lieutenant of Ireland, a post for which he had few qualifications. Connected by marriage with a family which had long been conspicuous for extreme Orange opinions, he went to Ireland with the strong prejudices of the great bulk of the Irish people arrayed against him, and he so acted as to increase those prejudices, and even stimulate them into passions. Lord Eliot, the Irish Secretary, was, however, a perfect contrast to the Lord-Lieutenant; moderate, liberal, and conciliatory, he won the respect of his political opponents, and even allayed much of the irritation which the too manifest partialities of the Lord-Lieutenant had not unreasonably provoked.

Next to Sir Robert Peel, the most influential and active members of the cabinet were the Home and Colonial Secretaries. Sir James Graham was an excellent man of business, an eloquent speaker, and generally a very clever tactician in the management of parties; but he was not unfrequently betrayed into unguarded expressions in the heat of debate, which compromised both himself and his party. Still he was prudence personified when compared with Lord Stanley, whose temper had not improved with age, and whose passions seemed to have acquired strength with years. Haughty to his colleagues, insulting to his opponents, and repulsive to all with whom he had to transact business, he showed that exalted talents and the most pure intentions may be rendered unavailing by the infirmities of an unbending will and dictatorial habits. From the first it was obvious that he had few sympathies in common with the premier, and that he and Sir Robert Peel would not, and could not, long continue in the same cabinet.

The Earl of Lincoln, the Honourable Sidney Herbert, and, at a later period, the Earl of Dalhousie and the Honourable G. P. Smythe, were young politicians, whose merits Peel must be commended for appreciating, and whom it was highly creditable to him to have introduced into public life. The only Irishmen in the list were Mr. Young and Mr. Emerson Tennent. It will be seen that an English lawyer, Sir Edward Sugden, was appointed Lord Chancellor of Ireland, but of this the Whigs could not complain, for, just before leaving office, they had compelled Lord Plunkett, in rather an ungracious manner, to resign, for the purpose of bestowing this dignity, though for a very brief space, on Lord Campbell.

The re-elections of the members of the government having taken place without the loss of a single seat, Sir Robert Peel took an early opportunity of stating, that he would for the present take the miscellaneous estimates as they had been prepared by the late government, and that he would also continue the existing Poor Law for another year. He then adverted to the financial condition of the country, and the general policy of the new government, in the following terms :—

“With respect to the financial arrangements of the year, my right honourable friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer will, on the earliest day upon which a Committee of Ways and Means can be appointed, state to the House what is the deficiency to be provided for, upon comparing the expenditure with the revenue for the present year.

“I apprehend that it will be found not to fall short of the estimate given by the Chancellor of the Exchequer, and that the sum of nearly £2,500,000 will have to be provided for the service of the current year. Into the details of this question my right honourable friend will then enter, and avail himself of that opportunity to state what are the

measures by which he proposes to constitute a temporary power of meeting that deficiency.

"With respect to measures of a more permanent character, having for their object to equalize the revenue and expenditure of the country, it is not our intention during the present session of parliament to submit any measures for the consideration of the House. I have already expressed my opinion that it is absolutely necessary to provide effectually for the equalization of the revenue and expenditure, and we shall avail ourselves of the earliest opportunity, after a mature consideration of the circumstances and condition of the country, to submit to parliament measures for the purpose of remedying the existing evils. Whether that is to be done by diminishing the expenditure of the country, or by increasing the revenue, or by a combination of these two means, I must postpone the further consideration. It is enough for me to state at present, that it is impossible for the country, consistently with the public interests, to proceed in that financial course which has been pursued for several years past; but in proceeding to consider the mode in which so great an evil is to be remedied, I must ask for the confidence of the House to her Majesty's government, while they give to that subject their most serious consideration. With regard to other measures of a permanent nature, I must make the same appeal to your confidence. It is perfectly true that for some days past I and my colleagues have been in possession of the powers of government, but the arrangements which I have had to make for completing the administration have not placed me in a position to proceed any further in the consideration of measures of such great and permanent importance to the well-being of the country.

"It is unquestionably out of no disrespect to the authority of parliament, that I decline to submit my views upon these subjects; it is not on account of the advanced period of the

year, not on account of the probably deficient attendance of members, not on account of the temptation to indulge in other avocations. My opinion is, that all such considerations ought to be sacrificed to the paramount consideration of duty, and should not be permitted to interfere in the slightest degree with the business of the nation. The ground upon which I forbear from calling the attention of parliament to measures of that important character, rests on the peculiar circumstances connected with the formation of her Majesty's present government. I believe it to have been a just and true expression of opinion before the late elections, that there was a great desire upon the part of those who will probably be the warmest opponents of her Majesty's government, to give them a fair trial; and I now declare that, on the earliest possible occasion, the public will find that the opinions of her Majesty's government upon these most important subjects, shall be fully stated to parliament. In the mean time, I trust that I do not misunderstand the general feeling of the House, that on the whole it is right, upon the formation of a new government, that time should be given to them to consider those measures which they may think expedient to be introduced, in connection with the financial difficulties of the country."

Lord John Russell, on a subsequent night, animadverted on the probable policy of the ministers respecting the Corn Laws, and declared that the presence of the Duke of Buckingham in the cabinet, was a significant intimation that these laws would be maintained in all their stringency. Sir Robert Peel indirectly intimated that such a conclusion was unfounded, and appealed to the House to repose such confidence in him, as would afford time for maturing the measures he had in contemplation.

"I should have thought it so reasonable," he said, "that after a lapse of ten years—for which I, with the exception of

some three or four months, have held the situation of a private individual—I should have thought that after returning to power after a lapse of ten years, there would have been a universal impression that it was but reasonable that I should not be called upon within a month to propose an alteration of the law in respect to the trade in corn. I should have thought that it would have been felt that there might be advantage in the access to official information—that it might be desirable to avail oneself of the information that exists, to ascertain the opinions of those who receive large emoluments from the public for the purpose of collecting information, and that it was but reasonable to permit me to have an interval, in conjunction with my colleagues, for the purpose of deliberately considering the proposition we should make. But if I am responsible for not proposing a measure on the Corn Laws within one month of my accession to office, what must be thought of that government—that has held office for five years, and which never until the month of May, 1841, intimated, on the part of that government, a united opinion?

“What! if you are so convinced of the intolerable evils inflicted upon this country by the operation of the Corn Laws—if you think that commercial distress is to be attributed justly to them—if you think they are at the root of the privation and suffering to which the labouring classes in some districts of the country are exposed—what has been your neglect of duty, in permitting five years to elapse without bringing forward on the part of a united government, a proposition for the remedy of these abuses? Why have you allowed this question to be an open question in the administration? You may say, that you had no hope of carrying it. I tell you then, that that course *I* will not pursue. I form my opinion on the subject of the alteration that may be made, and no consideration of convenience,

no leaving it an open question, to be proposed here and defeated there, shall prevent my bringing it forward; and having stated to the House of Commons the course I mean to pursue, on the part of a concurring and united government, of staking the existence of the government on the issue. But as regards this question, respecting which now you feel so deeply convinced—I ask, have you not remained in office permitting Lord Melbourne to hold different opinions!"

In conclusion, he thus adverted to the peculiar circumstances under which he had taken office:—

"What personal motive could I have had to induce me to undertake the burdens and responsibility of office? Is it likely that I would go through the labour which is daily imposed upon me, if I could not claim for myself the liberty of proposing to parliament those measures which I believe to be conducive to the public weal? I will claim that liberty—I will propose those measures; and I do assure this House, that no consideration of mere political support should induce me to hold such an office as that which I fill, by a servile tenure, which would compel me to be the instrument of carrying other men's opinions into effect. I do not estimate highly the distinction which office confers. To any man who is fit to hold it, its only value must be, not the patronage which the possessor is enabled to confer, but the opportunity which is offered to him of doing good to his country. And the moment I shall be convinced that that power is denied me, to be exercised in accordance with my own views of duty, I tell every one who hears me, that he confers on me no personal obligation in having placed me in this office. Free as the winds, I shall reserve to myself the power of retiring from the discharge of its onerous and harassing functions, the moment I feel that I cannot discharge them with satisfaction to the public, and to my own conscience."

The brief remainder of the session produced no event or debate requiring notice. But during the autumn and winter, the Anti-Corn-Law League greatly increased its strength, especially among the commercial and manufacturing classes, who became every day more thoroughly convinced by bitter experience, that the system of protection was the bane of the commerce and trade of the country. The distress which prevailed in the manufacturing districts, was indeed so great as to occupy a prominent place in her Majesty's speech at the close of the session, and there were already some who foresaw that differences of opinion on the means of its alleviation, would abate the warmth of the support given to the new ministry by its agricultural friends.

Compactly joined in opposition to the Whig government, the differences between Sir Robert Peel and the more violent of the Conservative party, had been studiously kept out of view on both sides. He differed from them on the question of National Education in England and Ireland ;—on the ground and extent of protecting duties ;—on the policy that ought to be pursued towards the Irish Catholics ;—and on several important points of foreign policy : but he allowed many, on whom he had to rely for support, to commit themselves too deeply on some or all of these points, and hence a Whig prelate shrewdly observed, that Peel's past opposition was likely to defeat his future ministry.

The commencement of 1842 found the Conservative administration firmly installed in office, and commanding large majorities in both Houses of Parliament ; but yet its tenure of power could not be considered quite so secure as a mere reference to its parliamentary strength would, under other circumstances, seem to indicate. The finances of the country were in no very encouraging state ; for several years there had been an alarming and annual decrease in the revenue, while our wars in India and China had produced a

considerable increase in the expenditure. The increasing excitement and agitation produced by the discussion of the Corn Laws had led to dangerous dissension between the agricultural and manufacturing interests; all the principal branches of trade and industry were sadly depressed, and in consequence there was a vast amount of distress among the operative population. The embarrassments of the country were beyond dispute, and even those most disposed to repose confidence in Peel's promise of remedial measures, could not but feel an anxious solicitude respecting their efficacy and success, as the time for their development drew nigh. The first indication of the course of policy which the ministers were likely to pursue, was the secession of the Duke of Buckingham from the cabinet. It was sufficiently obvious that he must have been induced to take this step by his disapprobation of the measure prepared by his colleagues for the settlement of the Corn Laws. Originally admitted into the cabinet as the uncompromising advocate of the agricultural interests, his presence there was regarded as a pledge of security to the Protectionists, and his resignation consequently produced much anxiety in that body.

Parliament was opened on the 3rd of February, under circumstances of unusual splendour, occasioned by the presence of the King of Prussia, who had at this time visited England to officiate as sponsor at the christening of the infant Prince of Wales. He was present at the ceremonial, which excited more than ordinary interest in consequence of her Majesty having so recently given an heir to the throne. The speech from the throne touched lightly on the state of the finances, and on the propriety of making some change in the duties levied on corn and other articles of foreign produce. The debate on the address was tame, all parties seeming to wait for the development of the new system of Corn Laws, which the premier was to propose on the 9th of February.

Such excitement within and without the House, as prevailed on that evening, had not been witnessed since the Reform bill. The Anti-Corn-Law delegates, from various parts of England, including some of the most wealthy manufacturers in the kingdom, filled Palace-Yard, and urged their representatives to abolish for ever the odious sliding-scale. The strangers' gallery was filled almost the moment that it was opened; the House itself was perfectly crammed with members; and several of the leading peers, including the Duke of Cambridge, occupied all the seats below the bar.

Sir Robert Peel then rose, and moved that the paragraph in her Majesty's speech relating to the Corn Laws be read. The motion being agreed to, the clerk at the table read the following paragraph in the speech from the throne:—"I recommend also to your consideration the state of the laws which affect the import of corn, and other articles, the produce of foreign countries." Sir Robert Peel next moved that the House resolve itself into a committee to consider the laws relating to the import of corn. The House accordingly resolved into committee, and Mr. Greene, the chairman of committees, having taken the chair, Sir Robert Peel again rose, and spoke as follows:—

"Sir,—I rise in pursuance of the notice which I have given, to submit to the House the views of her Majesty's government with respect to the modification and amendment of those laws which regulate the import of foreign corn. I should consider it a reflection on this House, were I to prefer any claim on its patience and indulgence. Whatever demands I might have to prefer, and however unqualified I may be to relieve a subject necessarily one of detail, necessarily abstruse, by any illustration of fancy, yet I am convinced that the paramount importance of the subject itself will induce the House to lend me that patient attention, for which, under other circumstances, I might have deemed it necessary to appeal to its indul-

gence. I am aware of the difficulties which encompass the subject I am about to bring under the consideration of the House. With regard to a matter in respect to which such adverse opinions prevail, it is difficult to discuss it without making statements or admissions which will be seized on by those who entertain opposite opinions; but I feel that the best course I can pursue is to submit to the House the considerations which influenced the judgment and decision of her Majesty's government, and to leave them to be decided on by the reason, moderation, and judgment of parliament. I am confident that the course which her Majesty's government have pursued in bringing forward this measure—whatever may be the differences of opinion as to its nature—I am confident that that course at least will meet with general approbation. If her Majesty's government deemed it right to submit a measure of this character to the consideration of parliament, it was due to the importance of the subject that the attention of parliament should be called to it in the speech from the throne. It was due also to the importance of the subject, that her Majesty's government should undertake, on their own responsibility, to propose a measure for the adjustment of this question, and that no interval which could be avoided should be allowed to elapse between the recommendation contained in the speech from the throne, for consideration of the subject by parliament, and the proposal of the measure itself. The only object which I shall aim at, in bringing this subject under the consideration of the House, will be to state as clearly and as intelligibly as I can, the considerations which have influenced her Majesty's government in reference to the nature of the measure I am about to propose. One other object I shall aim at—namely, to discuss this question, affecting such mighty interests, in a temper and spirit conformable with its great importance, bearing in mind how easy it is, on each side, to raise exaggerated apprehension.

hensions, and find inflammatory topics by which the feelings of the people may be excited. Her Majesty's government have deemed it their duty to consider the Corn Laws with a view to their modification and amendment. They undertake the consideration of this question at a period when there is commercial distress, and when there exist great suffering and privations connected with that distress. But I feel it my duty, in the first place, to declare that, after having given to this subject the fullest consideration in my power, I cannot recommend the proposal which I have to make, by exciting a hope that it will tend materially and immediately to the mitigation of that commercial distress. While I admit the existence of commercial distress—while I deplore the sufferings which it has occasioned, and sympathize with those who have unfortunately been exposed to privations; yet I feel bound to declare that I cannot attribute the distress—to the extent in which it was by some supposed imputable—to the operation of the Corn Laws. I do not view with those feelings of despondency, with which some are inclined to regard them, the commercial prospects of this country.

"I do not believe that the resources of our commercial and manufacturing prosperity are dried up. I do see a combination of causes, acting concurrently and simultaneously, sufficient, in my opinion, to account, in a great degree, for the depression which has unfortunately prevailed among the manufacturing and commercial interests of this country; and I have that reliance on the native energies of this country, and I have had such frequent experience of preceding depressions and revivals almost as sudden and extraordinary as the depression which has recently occurred, that I do entertain a confident hope and belief that we may still look forward to the revival, by the operation of natural causes, of our commercial and manufacturing prosperity. It is impossible, I think, to take a review of the causes which have affected that

prosperity without perceiving that there have been in operation, during the last four or five years, several causes, the separate effect of which would have been considerable, but the concurrent effect of which is sufficient to account for the depression which has taken place. If you look at the stimulus which was given, partly, I think, by the facilities of credit, to great undertakings in 1837 and 1838; if you look to the connection which existed between the directors and parties concerned in joint-stock banks and the manufacturing establishments; if you look at the immense efforts made for the increase of manufactories and for the building of houses for the reception of those who were to labour in those manufactories; if you look at the immigration of labour from the rural districts to the seats of manufactures, and the immense increase of mechanical power which took place in consequence in the years 1837 and 1838, you will hardly be surprised to find that the result which has before attended similar excitement and stimulus should again ensue.

"The same causes which operated here to produce depression, operated also in the United States at the same time. The derangement of the monetary affairs of the United States has acted powerfully on the demand for our manufactured produce, and, concurrently with the depression in this country, has had the effect of diminishing the demand for British manufactures. There has been, at the same time, an interruption of our amicable relations with China, which has been the cause of a considerable deficiency in the exports to that country of our manufactured goods within a recent period, as compared with previous periods. There have been also, up to a recent period, an alarm of war in Europe, and that stagnation of commerce, which, in some degree, is inseparable from such a state of things. The united effect of these causes goes far, in my opinion, to account for that depression in our prosperity, which has

created so much regret. I am admitting the extent of that depression; and I am equally disposed to admit the extent of the privations and sufferings which have resulted; but I feel bound again to declare, that I cannot recommend the measure which I am about to propose, by exciting a hope that any alteration of the Corn Laws will be a remedy for some of the evils which, in a great manufacturing country like this, seem inseparable from the system. Extend your foreign commerce as you may, depend on it that it is not a necessary principle that the means of employment for manual labour will be proportioned to the extent of your commerce. Whatever may be the extent of your commercial prosperity—whatever may be the demand for your manufactures—it is impossible not to feel that, coincident with that general prosperity, there may exist, in particular districts, the severest partial distress.

"This must have been the case at periods of the greatest commercial and manufacturing prosperity. The necessary consequence of the sudden employment of machinery diminishing the demand for manual labour, must be to expose, in certain districts of the country, those who depended for support on manual labour, to great privations and suffering. You find hundreds of persons occupied in a great manufacturing establishment. Their reliance for subsistence has been placed on their labour in that establishment; but by an exercise of ingenuity, some improvement in machinery is suddenly devised, and copied by others, which has the effect of depriving of employment those who have relied on manual labour for subsistence. This has been the case with the handloom weavers, and with many parties engaged in manufactures. It is the hard condition, inseparable from a manufacturing country, that there must be such revulsions in the demand for manual labour; and it is not an impeachment, therefore, of any commercial system,

that great privations and sufferings exist. Let it not be supposed that I am deprecating the exercise of skill and the improvement of mechanical power. It would be madness to attempt to check them. It would be folly to deny, that in the aggregate, this country has derived a great source of strength from such improvements in manufactories. The attempt to obstruct them would have the necessary effect of encouraging competitors and rivals, already too formidable. In referring to instances of distress, inseparably connected, as it appears to me, with such development of skill and improvement in machinery, I do not do so for the purpose of impeaching that skill, or deprecating that improvement, but for the purpose of discouraging the too sanguine hope that any extent of legislative interference can exempt you from the occasional recurrence of distress. In proportion to the manufacturing excitement—to the *stimuli* to which I have referred—the *stimuli* of speculation—of facilities for undertakings created by undue advances and credit—in that proportion must you expect that, in certain districts, those privations to which the attention of parliament has been called, will occur. But looking at the general state of the commerce of this country, I neither see grounds for that despondency, with which some are in the habit of viewing it, nor can I see any ground for imputing to the operation of the Corn Laws, as some do, any material share in the evils at present existing."

Having pointed out various causes, quite independent of the Corn Laws, for the existing distress, he proceeded to examine the effect of these laws on the condition of the operative population: "Now let us compare the condition of the labouring classes in this country, under the operation of the Corn Laws, with their condition in other countries, in which, I admit, the price of provisions is greatly less. There is nothing to impede the cultivation of corn in the Prussian

states, in which its priece is greatly lower than in this country. But can it be thence inferred, that the eondition of the people in the Prussian states is preferable to the eondition of the people in this country, or that the consequence of an immense reduction in the priece of various artieles, and particullarly in the priece of food, must necessarily lead to a great increase in the eomforts and enjoyments of the labouring classes in this country? Sir, there are means, from sourees I apprehend of unquestionable authority, for forming a judgment as to the eomparative degree of eomfort enjoyed by the people of the two countries I have mentioned; and, before you determine that a low priece of provisions is neeessarily essential to manufacturing industry, general consumption, or to the eomforts and enjoyments of the people, it will be well to weigh the materials of whieh you are possessed for forming a judgment on the subjeet."

He then quoted at great length, Dr. Bowring's evidenee in the eondition of Prussia, from which he inferred that—  
‘Looking to the command enjoyed by the laborious classes, of the neeessaries and eomforts of life, it is found to exist to a far greater extent in England than in Prussia, although there the priece of grain scarcely exceeds half that which it bears in this country. I do not mean to say that this forms any argument against increasing that amount; I do not wish to push my eonelusion further than the point to whieh it can be legitimately brought. My argument goes to show that it is not fair to appeal to the diminished priece of food in other countries, as proving increased eomfort in the people in proportion as the artiele is low-prieded.’

Having repeated his former arguments against a fixed duty, he thus stated the principles on whieh he was prepared to legislate:—“The alterations of the law whieh I shall propose, will proeed on the principle of retaining a duty upon corn, varying inversely with the priece of the artiele

in the home-market—that is, the principle of the existing law. The retention of that principle necessarily involves the maintenance of a system of averages. It has, indeed, been said that there would be a great advantage in sweeping away altogether the system of averages. It is quite obvious that whether it may or may not be desirable to abandon the system of averages with respect to the imposition of a duty on corn, you must nevertheless maintain a system of averages, because the whole of your proceedings under the Tithe Commutation act are founded on the system of averages. It is impossible for you to abolish the system of averages, because the annual payments on account of tithes are founded on calculations connected with it; and it does appear to me, that as the averages must be maintained for the purpose of the payments under the Tithe Commutation act, it would not be expedient to adopt any other system of averages materially varying in principle from that for determining the duty on corn. I hope I shall not be misunderstood. I am not saying that because there is a system of averages for fixing the payments to be made under the Tithe Commutation act, therefore you must apply a system of averages for the purpose of determining the duty on corn. That is not my argument. I am merely stating that you cannot dispense with a system of averages while your present Tithe Commutation act continues in force. The averages must be taken, in order to determine the payments under the tithe law; and I say, that as you have to determine the amount of payment applicable to tithe by averages, and also the amount of duty to be imposed on corn, it would be inconvenient, on the one hand, to have two systems of averages prevailing in the country at the same time; while, on the other hand, it would be inconvenient and unjust to depart materially from that principle on which the averages with respect to tithes are determined.

I propose, therefore, as a necessary incident of a varying duty, to retain a system of averages."

Having proposed some improvement in the system of taking the averages, he thus continued:—"I will now, with the permission of the House, proceed in the course of a few moments to read the scale of duties which I propose should be applied to corn. That scale, sir, has been devised with a sincere desire to afford to agriculture and the agricultural interest every protection which they can legitimately expect. It has at the same time been devised for the purpose, when foreign corn shall be required, of facilitating as far as possible commercial intercourse with respect to corn, and subjecting the dealing in corn, as far as possible consistently with the principle on which the duties are to be levied, to the laws which regulate ordinary commerce. Nothing can be more difficult than to attempt to determine the amount of protection required for the home-producer. I am almost afraid even to mention the term 'remunerating price,' because I know how necessarily vague must be the idea which is attached to it. The price requisite in order to remunerate the home-grower must necessarily vary: a thousand circumstances must be taken into account before you can determine whether a certain price will be a sufficient remuneration or not; and the same difficulty occurs when we attempt to determine on adjusting the scale of duties.

The two great points to determine, if we wish to give a just and sufficient protection to domestic agriculture, are, first, what is the price which, on the whole, taking a comprehensive view of the circumstances attending the growth of corn, and viewing the general production of the country, may be supposed to constitute a sufficient encouragement to the growth of wheat or any other kind of agricultural produce. Another element of that consideration and of that determination must necessarily be the price of foreign corn brought

into the country, under competition with domestic produce. To attempt to draw any accurate conclusion on both of these two elements of the question, must be difficult, from the various opinions that prevail, and the conflicting nature of the details. I have drawn a conclusion as well as I could, without being able to say that I feel it to be completely accurate. But with regard to the price of wheat in this country, there are some elements, at least, towards determining what may be considered a fair average, speaking of the country at large. Now, if we take the average of prices of wheat which determines the commutation of tithes, the principle on which the Tithe bill passed, taking the average of seven years, we find the price of wheat during those seven years to have been 56s. 8d.

“ If we take the average of wheat for the last ten years, we shall find that the price has been about 56s. 11d. But in that average is included the average of the last three years, when corn has been higher certainly than any one would wish to see it continue. Allowing for that excess of price, however, 56s. 11d. was the average price for the last ten years. Now, with reference to the probable remunerating price, I should say, that for the protection of the agricultural interest, as far as I can possibly form a judgment, if the price of wheat in this country, allowing for its natural oscillations, could be limited to some such amount as between 54s. and 58s., I do not believe that it is for the interest of the agriculturist that it should be higher. Take the average of the last ten years, excluding from some portion of the average the extreme prices of the last three years, and 56s. would be found to be the average; and, so far as I can form an idea of what would constitute a fair remunerating price, I for one should never wish to see it vary more than I have said. I cannot say, on the other hand, that I am able to see any great or permanent advantage to be derived from the diminution of the price of

corn beyond the lowest amount I have named, if I look at the subject in connection with the general position of the country, the existing relations of landlord and tenant, the burdens upon land, and the habits of the country. When I name this sum, however, I must beg altogether to disclaim mentioning it as a pivot or remunerating price, or any inference that the legislature can guarantee the continuance of that price; for I know it to be impossible to effect any such object by a legislative enactment. It is utterly beyond your power, and a mere delusion, to say, that by any duty, fixed or otherwise, you can guarantee a certain price to the produce. It is beyond the reach of the legislature. In 1835, when you had what some thought was a nominal protection to the amount of 64s., the average price of wheat did not exceed 39s. 8d.; and I again repeat, that it is only encouraging delusion to hold out the hope that this species of protection can be afforded to the agriculturist.

" To return, however, to the subject; I again say, that nothing can be more vague than to attempt to define a remunerating price. The different qualities of land, and a thousand other considerations, enter into the question; and I must say that the same difficulty exists to a much greater extent as to determining exactly the rate at which foreign corn can be brought into this country. Here, again, you must first ascertain the quality of the corn, the cost of freight, the distance of the country the corn is brought from; all these considerations ought to enter into the calculation; and, therefore, it is almost impossible to determine what should be the exact price at which foreign corn shall be admitted into the market. With these observations I will now at once proceed to read the scale of duties which her Majesty's government propose as a substitute for the existing scale.

" We propose that when corn is at 50s. and under 51s.

in price, a duty of 20s. shall be taken, but that in no case shall that duty be exceeded. We propose that when the price is 51s. and under 52s. the duty shall be 19s.; and after this we propose that there should be what I should call a rest in the scale. That at the three next items of price the duty should be uniform. Thus it would be:—When the price is 52s. and under 53s. the duty should be 18s.; when 53s. and under 54s., 18s.; and when 54s. and under 55s., still 18s. When the price is 55s. and under 56s., we propose that the duty shall be 17s.; when 56s. and under 57s., that it shall be 16s.; when 57s. and under 58s., that it shall be 15s.; when 58s. and under 59s., that it shall be 14s.; when 59s. and under 60s., that it shall be 13s.; when 60s. and under 61s., that it shall be 12s.; when 61s. and under 62s., that it shall be 11s.; when 62s. and under 63s., that it shall be 10s.; when 63s. and under 64s., that it shall be 9s.; when 64s. and under 65s., that it shall be 8s.; and when 65s. and under 66s., that it shall be 7s. At the three next items of price I propose another rest in the scale, similar to the former. I should propose upon the next three a duty of 6s., that is to say, when the price is 66s. and under 67s., when it is 67s. and under 68s., and when it is 68s. and under 69s.; in each of those cases the duty would be 6s. When the price is 69s. and under 70s., I propose a duty of 5s.; when 70s. and under 71s., a duty of 4s.; when 71s. and under 72s., a duty of 3s.; when 72s. and under 73s., a duty of 2s.; and when 73s. and under 74s., a duty of 1s. the quarter. When that price is arrived at, I propose that the duty should altogether cease. The sum of the proposition then is this, that when corn in the British market is under the price of 51s. the quarter, a duty of 20s. shall be levied, which duty shall never be exceeded, for I am quite satisfied that it is useless to take any greater amount of duty.”

Having stated the proportionate scale to be applied to other kinds of grain, he stated the great change proposed respecting colonial produce:—

“And now I must enter into a short explanation respecting colonial wheat. The law with respect to it is to this effect—that British colonial wheat and flour shall be imported into this country at a duty of 5s., whenever the price of British wheat is below 67s.; that when the price of British wheat exceeds 67s., it shall then be admissible at a duty of 6d. I propose to give the same advantage to colonial wheat, respecting the reduction of prices at which it shall be admissible, as is given to other descriptions of wheat. But, considering that the sudden drop in the prices from 5s. to 6d., on account of the difference of 1s. in the price, is at variance with the principle of the law which seeks to establish as equable and uniform a reduction of duty as possible, we propose to make this arrangement respecting colonial wheat—that when the price of British wheat is under 55s., the duty upon every quarter of British colonial wheat shall be 5s.; that when at 55s. and under 56s., it shall be 4s.; when at 56s. and under 57s., it shall be 3s.; when at 57s. and under 58s., 2s.; and when at 58s. and upwards, it shall be 1s., thus taking away that sudden fall in the amount of duty levied upon colonial wheat which takes place under the existing law, but giving to the colonial wheat that advantage in the reduction of the price which is given to other descriptions of wheat. With respect to flour, I propose to maintain the same calculation as exists with respect to wheat, so as to allow it to be admitted upon the same relative terms.”

In conclusion, he said:—

“This is the proposal I am authorized on the part of her Majesty’s government to submit to the House. This is the proposal which, taking a review of the whole question, looking to the extent of the protection which, for a long series

of years past, the laws of this country have afforded to agriculture, adverting to those acts of parliament which have assumed a given price of wheat as the basis of rent, and the foundation of great legislative propositions, considering also the importance of deriving your supply, as far as you can, from domestic sources—this, I say, is the proposal which her Majesty's government, prompted by no other interest but that of the country at large, driven by no other pressure than that of their own judgment, consider it most for the advantage and welfare of the people should meet with the sanction of the legislature. Sir, this is not altogether an unfortunate period, in my opinion, for the adjustment of the question. In the first place, there is no such amount of foreign corn available to the supply of this country as need excite the alarm of those who dread an excess; and, in the next, there has been, during the period which has elapsed since the separation of parliament, concurrently with great commercial distress, as much of moderation, of tranquillity, and of disposition to view with due temper and calmness a proposal for the adjustment of this question, as could possibly have been anticipated. There may have been excitement—there may have been attempts to inflame the minds of the people—but this I must say, that the general demeanour and conduct of the great body of the people of this country, and of that portion of them who have been most exposed to sufferings on account of commercial distress, have been such as to entitle them to the utmost sympathy and respect. There is no difficulty, then, in the shape of violence interposed to the settlement of this question; and it appears to me to be perfectly open for legislation at the present moment. I earnestly trust that the result of the proposal which I now submit to the House, whether it be acceded to or not, will at all events be to lead to some satisfactory adjustment of the question. The adjustment we propose,

we propose, under the impression and belief that it is the best which, upon the whole, and looking to the complicated state of the various relations and interests in the country, we could submit for the consideration of the House, consistently with justice to all classes of her Majesty's subjects. If it is the pleasure of parliament to affirm that proposal, it will, of course, pass into a law. If it be the pleasure of parliament to reject it, I still hope that the question may be adjusted. Whatever may be the determination of parliament with respect to it, I shall conclude by expressing my most earnest and solemn hope, that the arrangement, whatever it may be, may be one most in concurrence with the permanent welfare of all classes, manufacturing, commercial, and agricultural, in the country."

Sir Robert Peel's measure was ably criticized by Lord John Russell, and was very severely reprobated by Mr. Cobden. Lord John Russell, when the debate was renewed, proposed an amendment, condemnatory of the principle of a sliding-scale, which was discussed for three successive nights in the House of Commons. On a division, there appeared for Lord John Russell's amendment 226, against it 349, giving a majority of 123 against a fixed duty and in favour of a sliding-scale.

Although such a majority was decisive as to the fate of the measure, the Hon. Mr. Villiers persevered in bringing forward his amendment affirming the principles of free trade. Some anxiety was felt, as to the course which the late ministers would take upon this occasion. Mr. Macaulay was the first to intimate that they would not support the demand for immediate repeal; but though he made this declaration, he delivered a most powerful speech in favour of free trade, and effectually demolished the protectionist fallacy which identified "cheap bread" with "low wages." Sir Robert Peel very sharply censured Mr. Macaulay and the late

ministers for adopting what he considered a trimming course, and not voting directly against a proposition which, as the advocates of some protection in the shape of a fixed duty, they must necessarily disapprove.

Mr. Cobden then rose, and delivered a vehement speech against the principle of the Corn Laws, and denied that it was necessary to maintain them, in order to prevent the rate of wages from falling to the Continental level. On this point he said—"I deny that labour, in this country, is higher paid than on the Continent. On the contrary, I am prepared to prove, from documents on the table of your own House, that the price of labour is cheaper here than in any part of the globe. I hear an expression of dissent from the other side; but I say to honourable gentlemen, when they measure the labour of an Englishman against the labour of the foreigner, they measure a day's labour indeed with a day's labour, but they forget the relative quality of the labour. I maintain that, if quality is to be the test, the labour of England is the cheapest in the world. The committee, which sat on machinery in the last session but one, demonstrated by their report, that labour on the Continent is dearer than in England. You have proof of it. Were it not so, do you think you would find in Germany, France, or Belgium so many English workmen? Go into any city from Calais to Vienna, containing a population of more than 10,000 inhabitants, and will you not find numbers of English artisans working side by side with the natives of the place, and earning twice as much as they do, or even more? Yet the masters who employ them, declare, notwithstanding the pay is higher, that the English labour is cheaper to them than the native labour."

In the course of the debate, Mr. Ferrand, who had entered parliament as member for Knaresborough, delivered a violent invective against the manufacturing interests, and

brought very grave, though utterly groundless, charges against the character of the principal manufacturers. His speech was warmly cheered by the ministerialists and the agricultural members, a circumstance which greatly aggravated the exasperation that was fast spreading through the country. After a debate of five nights, the House divided, when there appeared—for Mr. Villiers' motion 90, against it 393, giving a majority of 303 against free trade.

On the other hand, the agriculturists were far from being satisfied with the amount of protection secured to them by the new sliding-scale. Mr. Christopher became the organ of this discontented party in the House of Commons, and proposed a scale of duties higher than that brought forward by ministers. His motion was rejected by 306 against 104 votes; so that it appeared that the ultra-protectionists were more numerous than the pure free-traders, in the House of Commons.

Various skirmishing debates on the details of the ministerial proposition led to no very definite result, and, indeed, possessed but little importance. On the second reading of the bill, however, the warfare of parties was renewed with fresh vigour. Lords Ebrington and John Russell, Messrs. Buller and Sheil, renewed the assault on the principle of the sliding-scale, and reproached Sir Robert Peel with submitting to the dictation of his agricultural supporters. Still the tone of the debate was languid and spiritless; a circumstance to which Sir Robert Peel rather tauntingly referred, in his reply to Lord John Russell.

The truth is that the Anti-Corn-Law League had not succeeded in uniting the middle classes as yet in favour of Free Trade. There was a pretty general feeling that protection ought to be abolished gradually; and those who entertained this opinion, regarded the new measure as an important step towards the ultimate attainment of a free

import of provisions. In London, the ministerial measure was for the moment decidedly popular, and it was only reprobated in those manufacturing districts which had suffered most severely from commercial depression. The boast of Sir Robert Peel was not unfounded, when he said—"I did not want to bring forward a measure enunciating some general principle, and, after spending the session in discussion, find myself, in August, practically where I was in January previous. I wished to propose a measure which there would be a prospect of passing into a law—not giving universal satisfaction, for that I despaired of—but having the concurrence of the well-thinking, rational, intelligent portions of the community. Yes, and I have had it. And what makes your debates so flat and so dull? what, but that the country has decided in favour of my measure? I am not speaking of the Anti-Corn-Law League; it is quite impossible that they should so soon forget their vocation as to permit their acquiescence in this law. I am not speaking of the agricultural community. But I do believe that among the trading, manufacturing, commercial classes, there is a strong conviction that the measure I have proposed, looking at the existing state of the country, is a fair and just arrangement. Yes; and if it were otherwise, I should find the debates in this House carried on with much more spirit and vigour."

On the 11th of March, Sir Robert Peel developed to the House his scheme of finance, the principal features of which were the repeal of some onerous duties on articles of consumption, and the imposition of an Income Tax. Unpopular as such an inquisitorial tax must ever be, the country generally submitted to it with unusual and extraordinary patience. Everybody indeed was convinced that an efficient remedy for the disordered state of the finances, had become absolutely necessary; the efforts of the Whigs to

raise a cry against the new tax, produced little effect in the House, and out of doors were utter failures.

Under such circumstances, it is not surprising that Sir Robert Peel should have been a little proud of the unexampled confidence generally reposed in him by the country; but we may be somewhat astonished at the asperity with which he received the very gentle criticism bestowed upon his measure by the late ministers. In reply to Lord John Russell's intimation, that he and his friends would oppose the income tax, the premier, in a lofty and rather angry tone, said—“Notwithstanding the silence of the other night—notwithstanding the calmness with which my proposition was received—notwithstanding the declaration that my proposals should be considered as a whole, I felt that in the attempt to meet the difficulties in which this country had been involved by the financial administration of the late government—I felt that whatever efforts I might make, whether by the continuance of loans, whether by the imposition of taxes upon the income and property of the country, whether burdens upon the working-classes by means of taxes on articles of consumption, I had not undertaken an easy task; but I was confident that my chief opponents would be those who had involved the country in difficulties.”

When the income tax had received the sanction of the legislature, Sir Robert Peel brought forward the great measure of the session, his new tariff for lowering the import duties on some of the principal articles of consumption. This was a most decided step in the direction of Free Trade, and it excited universal alarm among the protectionists. The principal articles on which a reduction of duty was proposed, were seeds, timber, copper, oils, preserved and cured meat, lard, various kinds of manufacture, and live cattle.

The chief opposition which the new tariff had to encounter

was from the agricultural interest, which was seized with a kind of panic so soon as it was proposed to admit foreign meat and cattle. Sir Robert Peel devoted a great part of his speech to a refutation of these senseless fears. He pointed out to them the advantage which would accrue from the importation of lean cattle to be fed and fattened on the rich grass-lands of England, and pointed out the increasing value and importance of our export trade in horses. He exposed the false assertions which had been industriously circulated respecting the low prices of meat on the Continent, and refuted them by reading the market-notes of the principal Continental cities. He showed the advantages that would accrue to all classes of the community from lowering the cost of living in England ; and having thus stated the grounds of the important changes which it was his intention to propose, he startled both friends and foes by as explicit an avowal of Free Trade doctrines as was ever uttered by an orator of the Anti-Corn-Law League. This remarkable declaration was couched in the following terms—

“I know that many gentlemen who are strong advocates for free trade may consider that I have not gone far enough. I believe that on the general principle of free trade there is now no great difference of opinion, and that all agree in the general rule, that we should purchase in the cheapest market and sell in the dearest. (*Loud cheers from the Opposition benches.*) I know the meaning of that cheer. I do not wish to raise a discussion on the Corn Laws or the Sugar Duties ; I have stated the grounds, on more than one occasion, why I consider these to be exceptions to the general rule, and I will not go into the question now. I know that I may be met with the complaints of gentlemen opposite, of the limited extent to which I have applied the general principle to which I have adverted, to these important articles. I thought, after the best consideration that I could give

to the subject, that if I proposed a greater change in the Corn Laws than that which I submitted to the consideration of the House, I should only aggravate the distresses of the country, and only increase the alarm which prevailed among important interests. I think that I have proposed, and the legislature has sanctioned, as great a change in the Corn Laws as was just or prudent, considering the engagements existing between landlord and tenant, and also the large amount of capital which has been applied to the cultivation of the soil. Under these circumstances, I think we have made as great a change as was consistent with the nature of the subject."

On a previous occasion, when the Income tax was under discussion, he had thus alluded to the alarm of the farmers :—

"I hope that my agricultural friends will suspend their judgment with respect to the probable operation of the new tariff, until I have had an opportunity of laying the case fairly and fully before them. I am very sure that although I propose to make a great reduction in the duties on articles of subsistence—although I propose to admit the introduction of fresh meat at a very low duty—although I abate the duty on salt meat, and permit live cattle to be introduced for the first time—yet I do not despair of being enabled to show that it will be for the interest of all classes, that prohibitory duties should be done away with. I mean to show the progressive rise that has of late years taken place in the price of meat—I mean to attempt to convince my agricultural friends, that in this country the production of cattle does not keep pace with the increase of population.

"I am sure my friends will act on the dictates of their own reason and judgment, and although I am also sure that they will not abandon me on the Property tax because they may differ from me on certain points of the tariff, yet I ask

them to suspend their judgment until I can state fully the case of that proposed measure. I shall show them, that in other countries the same inconvenience has been felt. I shall show them that in France the population has increased more rapidly than cattle could be supplied, and that the most extraordinary rise in the price of cattle was the consequence. I will show them, from documents the authority of which cannot be controverted, that there was also a great diminution in the consumption of meat in France. I will prove the high prices of cattle in France; I will prove that France is a cattle-importing country; and that that great neighbour of ours, with a population of upwards of 33,000,000, so far from being likely to inundate this country with cattle, will actually be a rival of ourselves in purchasing them from other nations. I shall show my agricultural friends that there are but slight grounds of apprehension from the importation of cattle from Belgium; slight grounds of apprehension from Holland. I will prove that the apprehension must be limited to a narrow district of Europe; and I will also attempt to prove that if importation of cattle into this country should take place, that that traffic will be for the advantage of the agriculturist as well as the manufacturer."

The Income-tax and the new tariff were to be taken together, and he thus reproached the Whigs for their opposition to the former:—

“ If you are afraid to submit to sacrifices, if you paint in glowing colours the miserable condition of those who are to pay taxes—if you say it is better to go on in the present system, increasing the debt a little more, funding at 91—(Cries of Hear, hear, from the Opposition benches)—why are the funds at 91? (Cheers from the Ministerial benches.) Public credit is high; the funds have risen; and, say you, ‘ You can have a loan easily now.’ Oh! you miserable financiers! I beg pardon if in the heat of debate I have

used a word that may give offence; but the funds are high because you have shown a disposition not to resort to a system of loans in a time of peace. The funds have risen, but throw out my Income-tax, and ask for a fresh loan to cover your deficiency in the revenue, and you will see the force of the argument—that because the funds are at 91, you may wait a little longer, and have a loan. No, that will depress the funds—that will prove a visionary scheme, and have the effect of sinking the funds. Funds are high while you maintain public credit, and all our disasters may be repaired while there is a conviction that you are willing to meet your difficulties."

Accusations of bribery and of compromising petitions at the late election having been brought against several members, a committee, of which Mr. Roebuck was chairman, investigated the charges; and when the report was presented to the House, Mr. Roebuck proposed that the issue of the writ to six boroughs should be suspended. Sir Robert Peel, in opposing the motion, said :—

"Why, that being translated, means no more than this: You have been guilty of an offence which is a violation of the liberties and privileges of the people, and a breach of the privileges of the House; still we will not call you to the bar, and ensure you, but any person who hereafter may offend in like manner, we will. But there are several other parts of these resolutions, with which I am not satisfied. The honourable gentleman by his resolutions declares these practices to be a violation of the liberties of the people, and a breach of the privileges of the House; now, I do not like dealing with general terms of this kind. I think the House ought not lightly to adopt such a declaration. The honourable gentleman does not state the particular nature of the compromise which shall constitute a violation of the liberties of the people, and a breach of the privileges of the House; but he refers to certain

compromises, all of which differ in character, and, speaking generally, says, they are breaches of privilege, and violations of the liberties of the people. If they be so, why do you not go on and censure the parties to them? When you talk of inefficient proceedings, is it not inefficient to pass by those guilty of these violations? Why, you abstain from censuring them, because we gave them reason to believe, that if they gave their evidence fairly, they should not be visited with censure. I wish to see a law passed which shall insure a full inquiry into, and a remedy against, such practices; but I am not quite certain that they are a breach of the privileges of the House, because when the House passed the Elections' Trial bill, it divested itself of the charge of inquiring into bribery, and said to individuals,—‘We leave it to you to prefer and defend charges of bribery.’”

We have taken this incident in connection with the discussion on the tariff, because Mr. Robtuek was one of a section of the liberal party, which had become alienated from the Whigs, and had shown a disposition to give independent support to Sir Robert Peel on the condition of his advancing in the career of practical reform. Strong as was his Conservative majority, the premier was anxious to retain this additional strength, for the murmurs of the agriculturists against his new tariff were not indistinct intimations that a revolt might be expected in the ranks of his supporters, should he persevere in his gradual reductions of the amount of protection.

Many other Free-traders, including some members of the League, believed that the course of events would force Peel to come to them for support. Some of the more violent Protectionists in the upper House had significantly intimated their power and their inclination to overthrow the ministry which they had raised to office. Sir Robert Peel was too proud and too conscious of his own great services to the Con-

servative party to consent to hold office by any servile tenure; it seemed, therefore, the policy of the Free-traders to raise debates on the fallacy of protection at every convenient occasion, so as to make more manifest the difference between the premier and his supporters. On one of these occasions, Sir Robert Peel gave the following explanation of his memorable Free-Trade declarations already quoted :—

“ I stated, and I am now ready to repeat the statement, that if we had to deal with a new society, in which those infinite and complicated interests which grow up under institutions like those in the midst of which we live, had found no existence, the true abstract principle would be, ‘ to buy in the cheapest market, and to sell in the dearest.’ And yet it is quite clear, that it would be utterly impossible to apply that principle in a state of society such as that in which we live, without a due consideration of the interests which have grown up under the protection of former laws. While contending for the justice of the abstract principle, we may at the same time admit the necessity of applying it partially ; and I think the proper object is first of all to lay the foundation of good laws, to provide the way for gradual improvements, which may thus be introduced without giving a shock to existing interests. If you do give a shock to those interests, you create prejudices against the principles themselves, and only aggravate the distress. This is the principle on which we attempted to proceed in the preparation of the tariff.”

The object of Mr. Villiers’ motion was to obtain a committee on the state of the nation, when he trusted to be able to show that the existing distress in the manufacturing districts could only be attributed to the mischievous operation of the Corn Laws. Short as was the time which had elapsed since the commencement of the session, Free-trade opinion had, in the interval, made very considerable progress. The lectures delivered and the tracts circulated by the active

agents of the Anti-Corn-Law League had brought conviction to the minds of multitudes who had not previously considered the subject; several who had been prejudiced in favour of protection were shaken; and a resolution adopted by the League to keep the Free-trade agitation perfectly independent of all other party and political movements, gave a unity to their purpose, and a concentration to their exertions, which soon rendered their body one of the most powerful associations that had ever been formed within the limits of a state.

The economic principles enunciated by the premier himself gave great strength to the Free-traders: they took advantage of his admissions, to point out the impolicy of retaining restrictions; not unreasonably arguing, that if great relief was to be obtained from the relaxation of protecting duties, it necessarily followed that those which were still retained tended to protract the sufferings of the country. The force of such arguments was keenly felt by the premier; he met them by appeals to the services he had already rendered, by censures on the violence of any imprudent Leaguer, whose tongue or pen had wandered beyond the limits of discretion; by expressing a strong expectation and belief that the country was recovering its healthy state, and finally by a reasonable request that his recent financial arrangements should receive a fair trial before any further experiments were made on the revenues of the country. In reply to Mr. Villiers, he said—

“At the commencement of this year, declarations were constantly made about the comparative prices of meat in this country and abroad. There were constant prophecies that no attempt would be made to deal with the monopoly of provisions in respect to cattle and meat. In respect to rice, potatoes, fish, and various other articles of subsistence, there have been made most extensive reductions of duty; and with

respect to raw materials, there was likewise a reduction such as the advocates of Free-trade could scarcely complain of. The effect of all this change could not yet be fairly estimated; but then it was asked, ‘Do you intend to do nothing else?’ We do intend, after submitting it to the consideration of a committee, to propose a further measure, permitting the taking of foreign corn out of bond duty free, upon the substitution into the warehouse, or delivery for exportation, of equivalent quantities of flour and biscuit. With respect to other countries, it will be our endeavour to extend, on the true principles of reciprocal advantage, the commerce of the country.”

Having stated that the time which the preparation of the tariff required, had prevented him from yet maturing any measure on currency and banking, he continued:—“I hope, now that we have been able to bring these measures to a conclusion, with some difference of opinion on my side of the House, and with strong divisions against me, on account of the alarm given to the agricultural interest—that they will be allowed to have a fair trial; and if they do not prove calculated to increase the prosperity of the country—if they should prove inadequate to meet the distress of the country—in that case I shall be the first to admit, that no adherence to former opinions ought to prevent their full and careful revision. But I hope that no precipitate conclusions will be come to, but that a fair experiment will be made, in order that we may see whether they have a tendency to revive the prosperity of the country, and to terminate that stagnation which no person in this great community views with deeper concern than those who are immediately responsible for the government of the country.”

Among the many difficult problems which have been agitated in recent times, there is hardly one more important, or more difficult of solution, than to determine the extent to

which any interference between the employers and the employed is justifiable or expedient. The employment of women and children in mines and factories is one example of this difficulty ; in mines and collieries females and children were engaged in tasks injurious to health, and not unfrequently offensive to decency. Lord Ashley introduced a bill for checking these abuses, which received the sanction of the Lower House, but which, through the influence of the great coal-owners of the north, was sadly mutilated by the peers. The Whigs sharply reproached ministers for submitting to these amendments ; but the premier ably vindicated himself and his colleagues, showing that the bill was not one which involved any ministerial responsibility. Indeed, Sir Robert Peel, so far from favouring the extreme principles on which Lord Ashley based his philanthropic legislation, was strongly opposed to several of that noble lord's favourite plans, and especially to his bill for the limitation of the hours of labour in factories.

Within the last two years, three disgraceful assaults had been made on the person of the Queen, by wretches whom an insane love of notoriety had instigated to outrages likely to attract a large share of public attention. The improved spirit of the age would hardly endure the application of the extreme penalty of the law to such offences ; and thus the criminals were encouraged by a hope of impunity, as they knew that the capital sentence would not be carried into execution. Under those circumstances, Sir Robert Peel proposed that a minor punishment should be assigned to this class of offences, and thus stated the principles by which he was guided in this alteration of the law.

" I propose that any party so offending—that is, intending to hurt the Queen, or to alarm the Queen—shall be subject to the same penalties which apply to cases of larceny ; that is, that he be subject to transportation not exceeding

seven years; but we propose also another punishment more suitable to the offence, and more calculated to repress it—that there be a discretionary power of imprisonment for a certain period, with authority to inflict personal chastisement. I think this punishment will make known to the miscreants capable of harbouring such designs as are pointed out by this bill, that instead of exciting for their offence a most misplaced, and, I may say, stupid sympathy, their base and malignant motives in depriving her Majesty of that relaxation which she must naturally need from the cares and public anxieties of her station, will lead to a punishment proportioned to their detestable acts. I do confidently hope, that without calling for any powers of extreme severity, the provisions of this bill will be effectual for the purpose. For, observe what we have to guard against: it is not any traitorous attempt against the peace of the nation by conspiring to take away the life of the Sovereign; but it is the folly or malignity of wretches who are guilty of acts prompted by motives which are scarcely assignable. The law, in its charity to human nature, has omitted to provide for the case of any being formed like a man, who could find a satisfaction in firing a pistol at a young lady, that lady a mother, and that mother the Queen of these realms. It never entered into the conception of former law-makers, that anything so monstrous should arise, as that the Queen of these realms should not enjoy a degree of liberty granted to the meanest of her subjects. I am sure the House will respond to the proposition to give the security of this law for the protection of her Majesty."

Since this measure became law, the offences against which it was directed have altogether ceased; thus adding another to the many proofs, that certainty is far more efficacious than severity of punishment, in the prevention of crime.

The real business of the session, however, was confined

to the financial arrangements consequent on the establishment of the new Income tax and the amended tariff. The latter being generally regarded as a concession to Free-trade, hardly less in amount and importance than any which the Whigs had proposed. Lord Palmerston at the close of the session took a caustic retrospective review of the course of policy which the ministers had pursued, and humorously pictured the disappointment of the Protectionists at finding themselves abandoned by the ministers of their choice :— “ Their victory,” he said, “ was undoubtedly complete ; and our defeat, I am ready to acknowledge, amounted almost to a rout. Great was the triumph, loud the note of exultation. But, alas ! how vain is human wisdom ! how short the foresight of even the wisest of men ! when a few months passed over their heads, the songs of triumph were changed into cries of lamentation. The very parties whom they had selected to be their chosen champions—the very guardians whom they had armed with powers for their defence—turned their weapons upon them, and most inhumanly, and with unrelenting cruelty, struck blows which, if they have not already proved fatal, must in all probability lead sooner or later to their utter extinction.” In this style of acute reasoning, lively raillery, and polished sarcasm, Lord Palmerston continued an attack which was sure to leave a bitter sting in every wound inflicted. Sir Robert Peel felt the invective keenly ; he made a very vigorous defence of the course of policy which he had adopted, and referred with some complacency to the improvement in the public funds which had already taken place in consequence of his financial arrangements. To the insinuation that he had deceived his agricultural friends as to the conditions on which they were to give him their support, he replied with the following sarcastic retort, in which the bitterness of the attack was amply retaliated :

"I deny that I ever received support in such a manner. My public opinions were distinctly put on record in 1835 ; I have ever avowed the same principles, and no one can justly accuse me of having deceived my friends by measures inconsistent with what I formerly have held. Why, when last in office, I was taunted with being more liberal than my colleagues, and when I have proposed in office measures in accordance with the very principles I then avowed, I ought not to be charged with inconsistency or deception. The noble lord talked, forsooth, of my having adopted his principles. Why, where could I have found them ? The noble lord himself told us that we could not have inherited our measures from him or his colleagues ; that we could not have found them in the red boxes. That is quite true. Truly did the noble lord say, that we could not (according to the Indian fable) have imbibed the spirit of the last occupants of the seats we now fill. We derived no assistance from the principle or practice of our predecessors. But let me observe (for I never could withhold credit from those to whom it is due), those who first paid great attention to the state of our import duties were—not the late government—it is idle to talk of their efforts for the liberalization of our commercial policy merely on account of some trifling remission of duties on timber—but who brought forward that investigation which led to the consideration of the restrictions on commerce ? Why, the honourable member for Montrose, and my noble friend the member for Monmouthshire, to whom it was said at the time, that there were 'some slight inequalities in the customs' which the House might be usefully engaged in remedying. Was this committee brought forward by the government ? Was there on the part of the ministry manifested any interest at all in the approaching liberalization of our commercial system ? Not at all. There was a bare acquiescence in the appointment of the committee.

There never was a question which excited less of support from a government. No member of the government was even in the chair. Did any cabinet minister sanction by his presence the inquiry? Did the President or Vice-President of the Board of Trade attend at all constantly? No. There was only one subordinate member of the government, who, little foreseeing the sequel, gave something like an attendance. As to the late government, then, claiming any degree of credit for the appointment of that committee, or for the consideration of the evidence, or for the production of the results, nothing could be more perfectly preposterous. There could not be a more unjust attempt to defraud other men of their just credit; and then the defence of the noble lord for not bringing forward these measures when his government was weak, is no better than his defence for not having brought them forward when he was strong. For what does this defence of his neglect during the period of his weakness amount to? Says the noble lord, 'We had not strength to carry out our principles.' Then why did you not risk a dissolution or a resignation? You declare that the public feeling was with you; why then did you not depend upon it? That is the true way of carrying out principles. But now, when you have lost office, you come forward and take credit, forsooth, for courage and resolution which you might have shown, but which you did not show. Your not having made any sacrifice in vindicating the great principles you had (it would seem) adopted—does not this convict you of having been satisfied with being merely in office, and with having, while responsible for the exercise of power, preferred the retention of place to the defence of your professed principles? It was not only the being passive; you did all the evil you could possibly do, by retaining place without taking any pains, or risking any sacrifice, to enlighten the public mind, or enforce principles you pretend to have believed interwoven

with the prosperity of the country. You feared even to appeal to public opinion in behalf of principles you say you believed just—and you make a defence now. I saw the member for Stockport's countenance fall wofully when the noble lord was occupied full a quarter of an hour in proving that the Corn Laws had nothing to do with preventing the progress of national prosperity. The noble lord, in his enthusiastic defence of himself, attributed everything to the exclusive merits of his administration, and referred every improvement in the social condition of the country, not so much even to the general administration, as to his own labours in the Foreign Office.

“ I will give the noble lord all the credit of his Mocha coffee, and for thinking that the sending of armies to ravage and waste a country, is the best way of engendering a taste for the peaceful intercourse of commercial relations. But what did the noble lord prove? That under the old system of the Corn Laws—such is the omnipotent effect of a really good government in correcting the defects of legislation—the noble lord was enabled to augment our exports by millions.”

He then referred to the great length of time which had necessarily been devoted to the consideration of those great fiscal changes which had almost revolutionized the financial policy and administration of the country. He showed from the authority of his adversaries themselves that these changes were equally desirable and important, but that the late ministry had not sufficient strength, either in parliament or in the country, to carry any one of them into operation. This led him to draw a striking and sarcastic contrast between his own administration and that of the late government, which it must be confessed necessarily turned to his advantage. Personally addressing the Whigs, he said—

“ When I was last in office I was threatened with the defec-

tion of one hundred and fifty of my supporters on the malt-tax. I said directly—‘ This tax is necessary for the maintenance of public credit, and I must go down to propose it.’ I risked my government upon it, and what was the consequence? My friends were generous when they saw I was in earnest; difficulties vanished, and I carried the tax by a triumphant majority. I do not wish to deny, it was with some support from gentlemen opposite, but not enough to have secured success, had there been defection on the part of my own followers; and I made up my mind with the full persuasion that I should fail. That is the course which a public man ought to adopt, when he was satisfied himself as to the justice of any course he should determine to abide by the issue. You may depend upon it that this is the only course by which a government, convinced of the soundness of certain principles, can ever carry them.

“ Then, upon the importation of cattle, if I had been told by some hundred of my supporters, that they must withdraw their support, in the event of my pressing forward that measure, I might, following certain examples, have said—‘ Here is a plausible proposition about taking duty by weight instead of per head, I can manage perhaps to make an escape by means of this;’ or when members from different parts of the country were prepared only for the admission of liberal principles in all other cases but their own, I might have yielded; but I should have compromised the principles for which I was contending. I adhered then to my propositions, and carried them, partly by the support of gentlemen opposite, because they were aware I was acting honestly, and that, while I was dealing with small interests, I equally grappled with the great. Now the noble lord said, we had not proceeded with the Ecclesiastical Jurisdiction and the Registration bills. We were prepared to proceed. There surely were no difficulties in our way, after having overcome

the obstacles in the way of those great measures. But I was sure that, after the labour of the session, the measures mentioned could not have secured proper attention. Was I not right in that expectation? Why, when the noble lord has been passing his panegyrics on his late colleagues and himself, where are they? Where have they been for the last month? All the important business of the session, after the three first great measures, has been carried on during that period. Perhaps we have made, indeed, too much hurry in our anxiety for securing practical improvements; but certainly there has been more of business during the last month; and where have been the members of the late cabinet?

“ What a decisive refutation is this absence of all the assertions of the noble lord! What a decisive mark of public confidence! Do you say that the absence of such men during all the press and sweat of parliamentary business, argues indifference as to their public duties? No; but it argues entire, unqualified confidence in the government. They have left the noble lord (as was once said of another gentleman here)—

‘ The last rose of summer, all blooming alone,  
His lovely companions all wither'd and gone.’

Left him—‘to waste his sweetness on the desert air’—with the injunction to ‘bottle up a great speech, no matter how thin the House,’ let it explode at the end of the session all of itself. ‘Yes,’ said the noble lord, ‘but am I to move a vote of want of confidence, or something expressive of disgust?’ ‘Oh no!’ said his colleagues, ‘follow the example of Colonel Sibthorp, and move for returns which the most jealous and sensitive of ministers could not find it in his heart to oppose, but for Heaven’s sake don’t risk a division! Speak about America and Afghanistan, and everything else, only avoid any motion which may issue in a division of three to one against us.’ All this, however, does not

diminish the force of the compliment which the noble lord thus at the close of the session pays us, and which I gratefully acknowledge, feeling of course gratified that the members of the late government should have had entire confidence in the existing administration, with a conviction that they will not abuse the power entrusted to them. It is a kind of acknowledgment, on the part of the noble lord, that they have successors who can repair their blunders, and to whom the honour and welfare of the kingdom may safely be committed."

In his vindication of his foreign and Indian policy, Sir Robert Peel was less successful. Lord Ashburton had indeed put an end to the growing disputes between England and the United States, respecting the unsettled boundaries of the State of Maine, but it was believed that he had conceded too much to the American demands, and had thus fostered that passion for territorial aggrandisement which was fast gaining ground in the Houses of Congress. Lord Ellenborough's policy in India, so far as it was known, was still more strongly disapproved by the public, and was probably not very satisfactory to the premier himself. For this reason, he passed lightly over the affairs of Afghanistan, and returned to his main ground of defence, that he had not changed the principles which he had aided Mr. Huskisson in carrying out, and that he looked to no reward for undertaking the burdens and cares of office, but the hope of public approbation and future fame. To this he appealed in one of his best perorations—

"It is to that reward," he said, "that I and my colleagues aspire. If there be another reflection which cheers me onwards in my course, it is that, much as I may have disappointed, much as I may have dissatisfied, the honourable friends whom I see around me—much as they may asperse me in private parties to which the noble lord has access,





H. M. Colby

General Sir Robert Craufurd

and I have not—still I have found through all the difficulties of the session, that they have not withdrawn from us in power that confidence and support which cheered and inspired us in the blank regions of opposition. Next to the hope of that fame which is the sole reward to which we aspire, their kindness and confidence has been our leading impulse. It is a matter of great congratulation to me, to be enabled to compare their strength in 1833 with their strength at present; and to be permitted to entertain the hope, that in pursuing the course I believe to be best, not in deference to their fears and opinions, if I believe them wrong, I shall still, despite all anxieties and all disappointments, hold that place in their esteem which I value more than I do their political support."

Mr. Cobden said a few words after Sir Robert Peel sat down, complaining that the two disputants had said but little on the distress of the country, a subject which would haunt them in their retirement. He urged Sir Robert Peel to carry out further the commercial policy which he had so well commended; and he assured Lord Palmerston that there was a growing feeling in the nation that we had already meddled too much with the affairs of foreign countries.

Among the topics introduced into the royal speech, was a reference to the disasters which one division of the army had suffered in Afghanistan. A sudden revolt at Cabul had so taken the English by surprise, that no efficient resistance was made, and the envoy entered into terms of capitulation with barbarous chiefs utterly unacquainted with the obligations imposed by the laws of nations. The treaty was violated almost as soon as it was signed, and nearly one entire division of the army was massacred. Sir Robert Sale, who commanded another division at Jellalabad,

gallantly maintained his post against the vastly superior forces of the enemy, until a new army had been organized to march to his relief. The tardy proceedings of Lord Ellenborough raised a suspicion that he was inclined to make peace with the Afghans on disgraceful terms, but the force of public opinion overcame his reluctance. A strong force under General Pollock, compelled the Afghans to retreat from Jellalabad ; they were pursued to Cabul, where severe measures of retaliation were adopted, and effectual means taken to obtain the release of all the prisoners that had been left in the hands of the Afghans. The tardiness of Lord Ellenborough in the first instance, and the bombastic proclamations which he issued at the close of the campaign, gave much annoyance to the minister, and excited general ridicule throughout the country.

On the whole, however, Sir Robert Peel had reason to be proud of his parliamentary campaign. His plans of economical and financial reform had been developed early in the session, and had been carried out to their completion in a spirit which told well both in parliament, and throughout the country, for the earnestness and sincerity of the party by whom they had been propounded. He gained a character for those essential qualities of vigour and decision, in which the Whigs had been generally thought deficient ; and as the session proceeded, there was an obvious diminution of unity and concentration, in the various sections of the liberal party. The Anti-Corn-Law League held itself aloof from the Whigs, and the more aristocratic liberals hesitated about joining an association which seemed to array the manufacturing against the landed interest. The Whigs clung to their favourite scheme of a fixed duty, which was not supported by any party out of doors ; the Free-traders resolved to press their demand for the total

and immediate repeal of protective duties; they were weak in the House, but they felt themselves strong in the empire, and they began to organize and concentrate the public opinion, which they felt assured was ready to be pronounced in favour of their policy.

III.

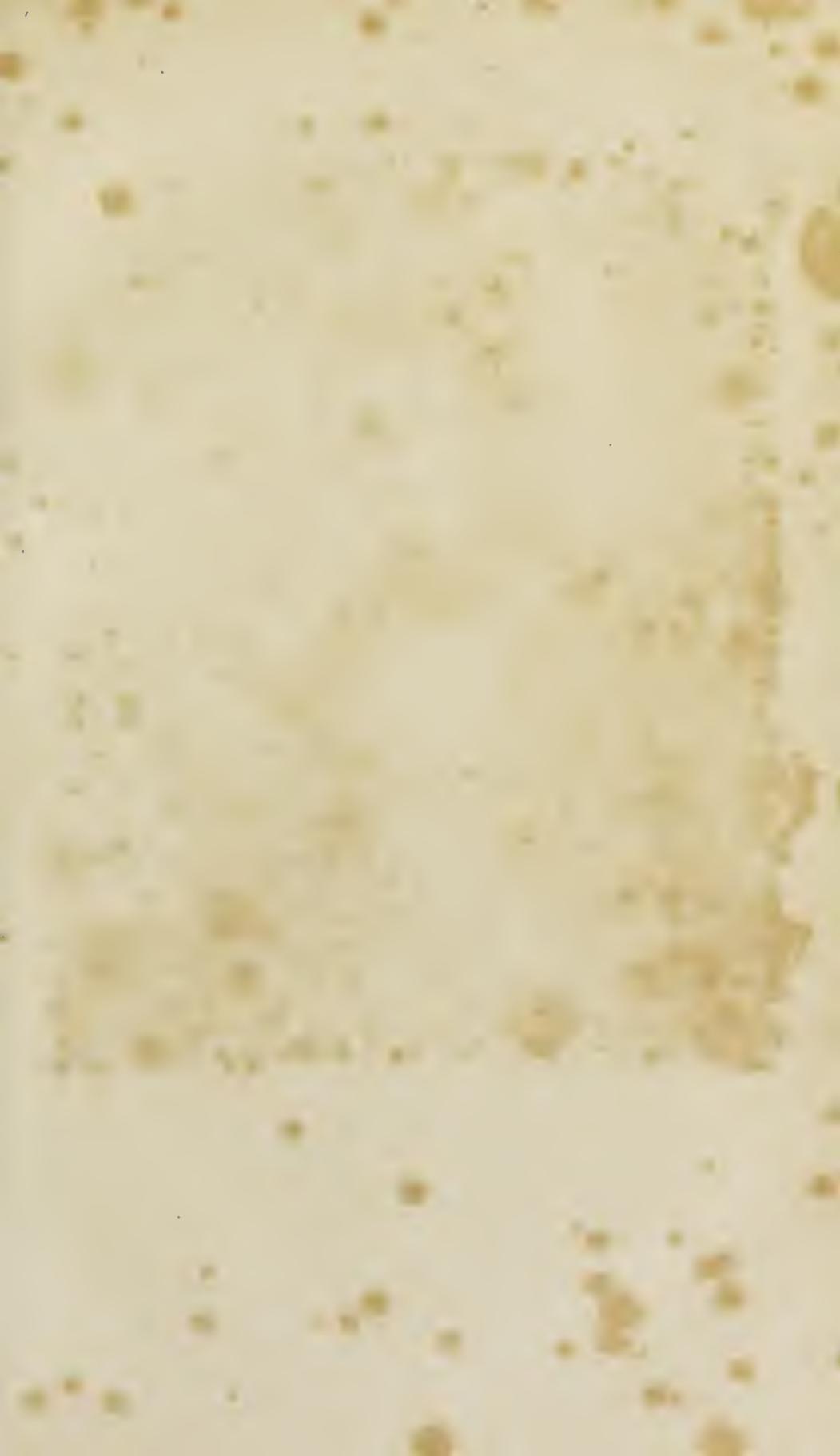
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## CHAPTER VI.

## THE FREE-TRADE AGITATION.

WE have had occasion to mention the Anti-Corn-Law League as a growing political power. The origin of this body was singular: An old doctor issued an advertisement stating, that on a certain night he would give a lecture on the Corn Laws in the theatre of Bolton. At the appointed time the house was crowded; but when the lecturer got up to address the audience, he was so confused that he could not utter a syllable. A formidable riot was about to ensue, when a young surgeon named Paulton, sprung upon the stage, and delivered an extempore but most energetic speech on the economic injuries which Corn Laws had brought on the trading and manufacturing classes. So much interest was excited by this clever display, that Mr. Paulton was requested to repeat the lecture, and he did so with an additional array of facts and arguments which carried complete conviction to the minds of his hearers.

A committee had a little before been formed in Manchester to take into consideration the distressed condition of the manufacturing districts, and to investigate its causes. It was attended by Dr. Bowring, one of the then representatives of the borough of Bolton; who, when he heard of the lectures of Mr. Paulton, invited that gentleman to come to Manchester, and to lay his views before the committee of manufacturers. Mr. Paulton obeyed the summons; his views met general concurrence, and it was resolved that he should be sent to disseminate his doctrines in the principal seats of





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RICHARD COBDEN, ESQ. M.P.

*Richard Cobden*

English manufacture. Soon after, the Manchester Chamber of Commerce, by an overwhelming majority, adopted a petition for the total and immediate repeal of the Corn Laws.

Once convinced that they had discovered the true cause and origin of the distress under which their trade laboured, the Manchester manufacturers set themselves to procure the repeal of the Corn Laws with their characteristic obstinacy and resolution. They formed an association, collected subscriptions, engaged an efficient staff of lecturers, established a paper called the Anti-Bread-Tax Circular, and circulated millions of tracts, pointing out the ruinous effects of the protective system. From the first their organization was most effective; they had the good fortune to obtain for their chairman, Mr. George Wilson, one of the most clever contrivers and able managers that ever directed a popular movement. But they fell into the not unnatural error of discussing the matter as if it were purely a manufacturer's question, and not one of vital interest to every class in the community. So long as the appearance of selfishness was stamped upon the movement, its progress was slow: though a party opposed to the Corn Laws on economic principles had long existed in the City of London, its leaders exhibited a manifest reluctance to fraternize with the men of Manchester; while the latter, yielding too much to provincial pride and prejudice, made no effort to advance their cause by concession and conciliation.

Richard Cobden, an eminent calico-printer, who had been only a few years settled in Manchester, and was therefore free from those local associations which fettered the progress of others, soon discovered the cause of the slow progress made by the principles of Free-Trade. He was well versed in the great truths of economic science, and had studied their practical application during his travels in both hemi-

spheres; he was respected for his talents and integrity by all his fellow-citizens; and though the petty jealousies of the manufacturers, which prevented their aiding in the elevation of their own order, had excluded him from the representation of Manchester, he had been elected for the neighbouring borough of Stockport, and had soon become the pride and the pet of his constituency.

Cobden saw that the Free-Trade agitation could never become a national movement until it received a metropolitan sanction. Chiefly at his instigation, delegates were sent to the metropolis, and some of the leading Free-Traders of London were induced to co-operate in their efforts to excite the public to investigate the practical working of the Corn Laws. An unexpected difficulty arose. The Chartist resolved that no topic but their own pet project, should be discussed at any public meeting, and hence, the opponents of the Corn Laws were clamoured down repeatedly, and their assemblies broken up by brutal violence. At length the Chartists gave the operatives the insane advice to stop all manufactures, declaring, that when every source of production and revenue was checked, the government would be compelled to capitulate, and submit to any terms which the working-classes might please to dictate. This preposterous experiment was tried: mobs assembled, and stopped the mills in various parts of South Lancashire; but the deluded multitudes abstained from any other acts of violence, and the firmness of the liberal magistrates prevented the success of some efforts made by monopolist magistrates to goad the mistaken dupes into armed insurrection. Some months before this, Mr. Cobden, at a meeting in London, had given a very graphic description of the Hanseatic League, and other similar associations, formed by the commercial cities of the Middle Ages, to check aristocratic robbery and oppression. Some one in the

meeting cried out, "Why should not we have a League?" Cobden at once caught the suggestion, and replied, "Yes; an Anti-Corn-Law League!" Under this name all the Anti-Corn-Law Associations in the kingdom were within a few weeks associated in one body, and a unity and concentration given to their efforts, which the leaders of the movement were not long in appreciating.

During the disturbances in the manufacturing districts, the League remained perfectly quiescent; its leaders saw that the Chartist movement was resolved to try their great experiment, and they felt assured, that its certain failure would lead the operatives to distrust deceiving demagogues for the future. The wisdom of this resolution was fully proved by the result. Cessation of work brought nothing to the operatives but increase of suffering; the necessities of their families compelled them to return to their employers, and in less than a fortnight, South Lancashire had assumed its usual aspect of tranquillity.

The principal members of the Council of the League were master-manufacturers, and against their class primarily was the Chartist movement directed. A clamour, however, was raised by the advocates of monopoly—that the whole of these disturbances had been organized by the League! and ministers were obliged so far to yield to the cry, as to send a lawyer to Manchester to investigate the charge. As might have been anticipated, the inquirer could obtain nothing like tangible evidence; but he collected a mass of vague rumours, imprudent speeches, and wild proposals, which only proved, that the League, like every other popular body, had its fair proportion of indiscreet members. The mass of evidence being useless for legal purposes, was given to the Right Honourable John Wilson Croker, who, by garbling and selecting isolated passages, produced a sharp article, inculpatory of the

League, which he inserted in the Quarterly Review. This paper eventually became of the greatest service to the League : Croker so exaggerated everything, and so absurdly over-stated his case, that his accusation was received with contemptuous laughter even by his own party, while the rest of the community scouted the monstrous ignorance, even of the very first elements of political economy, evinced by a writer who claimed for himself the authority of a political guide and a practical statesman.

Cobden read the article, and disdained not to derive instruction from an adversary : he saw clearly the difficulties and dangers arising from the *provincial* character of the League, and he resolved to devote all his energies to render the movement metropolitan and national. From this time until the final dissolution of the body, his chief difficulties as a leader arose from the Manchester members of the Council aiming to retain the entire management in their own hands, and to fetter all the operations resolved upon by the Direction in London. No other man but Cobden could have triumphed over these difficulties, his imperturbable temper, his unequalled discretion, and his silent resolution, baffled the ebullitions of provincial jealousy and intrigue ; and so quietly were these triumphs gained, that the existence of any dissension was not even suspected by the public.

At the beginning of 1843, the League had become a known, though hardly a formidable body, in the State. Inquiry had been stimulated, and the decreased consumption of the various articles from which the revenue of the excise is derived, led to an alarming diminution in the public income, while it afforded the most decisive evidence of the reality of that distress and privation among the working classes, which had been previously denied by the advocates of the protective system. The total decrease on the Excise, Customs, Stamps, and Assessed Taxes, for the quarter ending

January 5th, 1843, was £1,379,057, equal to more than a total annual deficiency of five millions and a half!—a result which afforded pregnant evidence of the reduced means and deteriorated condition of the mass of the people.

While the minds of men were saddened and occupied by this gloomy aspect of public affairs, all London was thrown into a state of unusual excitement by the assassination of Mr. Drummond, the private secretary of Sir Robert Peel, who had been mistaken by the murderer for the premier himself. The assassin proved to be a Scotchman, named Daniel M'Naghten, who laboured under the not uncommon mental delusion of believing himself the victim of some inexplicable persecution. His insanity became so great, that he quitted Glasgow, and came to London, in order to wreak vengeance on the author of his fancied wrongs. He frequented for some days the neighbourhood of the government offices, and asked the passengers to point out to him the person of Sir Robert Peel. He was shown the right honourable baronet walking in company with Mr. Drummond, and from subsequent events appears to have mistaken one for the other. On the evening of the 21st of January, Mr. Drummond, after having been in attendance on Sir Robert Peel at the Privy Council, called to visit his brother, the well-known banker at Charing-Cross. Immediately after leaving the bank, M'Naghten, who had watched his footsteps, came up suddenly, and discharged a pistol at him; he was preparing to fire a second when he was seized by the police. Mr. Drummond, however, had been mortally wounded by the first discharge, and expired three days after. M'Naghten, on the trial, having been clearly proved to be insane, was confined for life in a lunatic asylum.

This sad event deepened the gloom produced by the distress of the country. Sir Robert Peel took the first opportunity of debate, for endeavouring to calm the general alarm,

and to show that the pressure would only be temporary. He maintained that a great reduction had taken place in the price of articles of subsistence ; he said that in some parts of the country he saw indications of an increased consumption, which justified a hope that the condition of the country was improving. With respect to the further alterations urged by the advocates of Free-Trade, he declared that he adhered to the principles which he had laid down in the preceding session, but that he did not now contemplate any further great changes. This unsatisfactory and rather unexpected declaration was couched in the following terms :—

“ I did make, with the aid of my honourable friends and colleagues in office, more extensive changes in the commerce, and in the code which regulates the commerce of this country, than were made at any former period. If I had contemplated any further immediate and extensive changes, I would at once have proposed them in the course of last year. And why not ? I stated last year the general principles on which I should act, and to them, I repeat, I still adhere ; but I did not lead the House, or the right honourable gentleman, to suppose that I would go on year after year introducing extensive changes. I think it would be infinitely better, when a man has made up his mind as to the changes he contemplates, for him to propose them in one year, than to propose a certain number in that year, with a secret reservation as to what he will bring forward in the next. Whatever changes I do propose will be in conformity, when I do propose them, with the general principles which I have already laid down ; from none of which I recede, and of the truth of which I am perfectly convinced ; but, as I said last year, I cannot forget that for this country, protection has been the rule ; that, under it, great and extensive interests have grown up ; and that, in substituting a better for a defective system, if you proceed too hastily—if in your beneficent efforts to

create contentment, you produce distress—you run the risk of obstructing the fair and satisfactory progress of right principles. I cannot, therefore, state that I have any changes to propose in the commercial code of this country. When I do, it will be in conformity with the principles I have laid down; but I should deceive the right honourable gentleman if I led him to suppose there should be any such extensive changes as he has hinted at this year."

In conclusion, he said, that many of the arguments used last year against the present Corn Laws, had not been verified by experience; the alteration of the method of taking the averages, for instance, had not had the effect of lessening the apparent price five shillings, and thus raising the duty. He remained of opinion that the law had not had a sufficient trial, to warrant him in proposing its abrogation. He concluded with a renewed and distinct declaration:—

"When I introduced the Income Tax act, I stated my firm conviction that the effect of the other laws introduced would enable every party to make a saving in his expenditure equivalent to the sum I called from him in the shape of income tax. I believe that prediction has been fully verified, and that there has been such a reduction of prices as enables all parties to make a saving equivalent to the amount contributed by them in the shape of income tax. There will be other opportunities of discussing all these important matters, but as I was asked by the right honourable gentleman to come forward and declare my intentions, I think it right now to avow, that her Majesty's government have not in contemplation any amendment of the Corn Laws."

Such a declaration of a "do-nothing policy" in the midst of the wide-spread and alarming distress which pervaded the country, provoked much opposition. Amidst the general stagnation and inactivity that prevailed, the energetic appeals

of the advocates of Free-Trade, and especially of the Anti-Corn-Law League, forced themselves upon the public ear, and they failed not to avail themselves freely of the themes of depression and distress, as irresistible arguments against the continuance of that system of protection which they defied the government with all its majorities to maintain.

In this state of things, Lord Howick (since Earl Grey) gave notice of a motion for a committee of the whole House, to investigate the national distress. He brought forward his proposition on the 18th of February, and the debate was continued during five nights of very animated discussion. One of the most remarkable incidents in this protracted debate was, the unexpected and rather vehement declaration in favour of the principles of Free-Trade, made by the Home Secretary, Sir James Graham. Amid the loud cheers and loud laughter which feelings of surprise naturally excited, he said :—

“ By most men these principles were now acknowledged to be the principles of common sense, and the outline of these principles was now disputed but by few. The time had long gone by, when this country could exist solely as an agricultural country. We were now a commercial people. As long as Great Britain remained as she now was, the mistress of the seas, she must be the emporium of the commerce of the world ; and he felt perfectly satisfied that agricultural prosperity in this country, if deprived of the support of manufacturing prosperity, could not, and would not, long exist. He would even go further than this—he would say, that with the increasing population of this country—increasing as it did at the rate of somewhere about 220,000 per annum—it was indispensably necessary that there should be a progressive extension of commerce, and that none were more deeply interested in securing such extension than the landed interest of England. There

was an increasing population ; that increasing population must be employed ; it could only be employed by the payment of wages ; wages could only be paid out of profits, and profits were dependent on demand. He held these to be the principles of every man of common sense."

A still more striking incident marked the fifth and last night of the debate. Mr. Cobden, after having with equal ability and spirit, refuted the attacks made upon the Anti-Corn-Law League, drew attention to the special circumstances of the country and to the state of political parties. Having shown that the existing ministry was supported entirely by Sir Robert Peel, and that without him such an effete administration would not be tolerated for a moment, he declared that on the premier personally devolved the *responsibility* for the continued distress of the country.

Sir Robert Peel, with too obvious a reference to the fate of the late Mr. Drummond, called the attention of the House to the attempt to fix individual responsibility upon him personally, and more than insinuated that Cobden marked him out as a victim for assassination. Against such an odious interpretation of what was really but the simple statement of a well-known constitutional doctrine, that the individual responsibility of ministers was proportioned to their personal share of power, Cobden immediately protested ; but he was for the moment shouted down by the protectionists, who believed that they had caught their most dangerous enemy at a disadvantage, and that they had now an opportunity of crushing him for ever. In the excitement of debate, Peel availed himself of this unfair disadvantage, and, amid the cheers of his supporters, declared, that "no responsibility which Mr. Cobden could fix upon him, or induce others to fix upon him, should deter him from pursuing his duty." The warmth of the approbation with which this sentiment was received, naturally stimulated the orator, and

led him to use more bold and incautious language than was his custom. He rather bitterly assailed the Whigs for their vain attempts to settle the Corn question, conveniently forgetting that he had been the chief agent in frustrating these efforts. He was less prudent than usual when he said :—

“ You say we have made allusion in her Majesty’s speech to the distress, and yet have done nothing to alleviate it. You did the same. On the 16th January, 1840, her Majesty was advised thus to address parliament :—‘ My Lords and Gentlemen : I learn with great sorrow the evils to which the commercial embarrassments which have taken place in this and other countries are subjecting many of the manufacturing districts ! ’ words not very far from those her Majesty made use of in 1843. Now, what great measure of commercial relief is there, that you brought forward in 1840 ? You who taunt us with abandoning our principles, and not pushing our principles to their legitimate extent—what was your course in 1840 ? You, who say to us, ‘ you don’t deal with the Sugar question, you refuse to permit the importation of foreign sugar ; ’—what course did you take with respect to sugar in 1840 ? A motion was made on the subject ; and then it appeared, no doubt, that you were straining every nerve and making every sacrifice to obtain a free importation of sugar.

“ You were ten years in office, and during all that time you were deeply convinced of the principles of Free-Trade ; but notwithstanding this conviction, you did not think that 1840 was the time to carry them out. Even in that great article of consumption, sugar, you still continued to leave the mind of the country unsettled. Every one of those who now advocate the principles of Free-Trade, was opposed to the motion ; and the reasons which they gave for voting in the majority was, that foreign sugar was the produce of slave-labour. You charge us with keeping the public mind in a state of uncertainty with respect to the Corn Laws ; and you

do it in a manner as if for the last seven or eight years you had been its manly, constant, and consistent supporters—as if you had held it out as a panacea for all our political evils. When the question was debated in the House of Lords in 1840, what was the course adopted by government? was it one calculated to remove uneertainty? The Corn Laws were made an open question."

The independent members of the House showed an honourable anxiety to vindicate Mr. Cobden from the odious accusation which they thought that the premier had unjustly and invidiously attempted to fasten upon him. Lord John Russell, who spoke after Sir Robert Peel, explained the obvious sense in which the member for Stockport had stated a doctrine, without which all constitutional government would be a mockery and a delusion. At the close of the debate, Mr. Cobden repeated his explanation; which Sir Robert Peel accepted, but so equivocally, that it was doubtful whether he did not endeavour to fix the imputation of instigating to assassination more firmly on the rising agitator.

Too much importance abroad and at home has been attributed to this incident, for us to pass over it lightly. Having been present on the occasion, and compared our impressions with those of men belonging to every division of party, we are led to believe that Sir Robert Peel did in the first instance misapprehend the purport of Mr. Cobden's remark, and that the cheers of his followers did for a time seem to him confirmations of this mis-interpretation. But if he made this mistake, he was undoubtedly almost the only man in the House who did so. When he cheered in a marked manner the phrase of Cobden's speech on which he fastened, he was quite alone, and there was a manifest feeling of puzzled surprise on the ministerial benches, and a difficulty to discover the nature of the sentiment to which he thus directed attention. When his interpretation of it was made known

in his speech, it was so obviously seized as an unexpected advantage over a formidable adversary, that even in the ministerial ranks there were whispered protests against such obvious unfairness. Finally, Cobden's explanation was not as fairly received as it was candidly tendered, and Sir Robert Peel left upon all present the impression that he was not satisfied with the disavowal of any intention to point him out as a public victim.

The impression produced on us as witnesses of the incident may have been erroneous; but if so, we shared the error with all the conductors of public journals in the United Kingdom. Every paper on the ministerial side denounced the principles of the League as tending to doctrines of assassination, which all the rest of the press showed that the simple recital of the facts was an ample refutation of such a propitious calumny.

For two or three hours the incident gave Cobden pain: to the last day of his ministerial existence, the premier felt the consequence of an error, which we believe to have been involuntary; but which we deem that he should promptly have corrected, so soon as he discovered the base use to which it was perverted by some of his unscrupulous adherents. Addresses on all sides were sent to Cobden, some of them signed by the most violent of his political opponents, declaring that the odious and forced interpretation attempted to be fixed upon his words was sufficiently contradicted by the whole tenor of his public and private life. No address ever appeared from persons sharing, or affecting to share, in the groundless alarms of Sir Robert Peel.

One of the arguments most strongly urged in favour of the Corn Laws was, that land was subject to many special burdens, for which protection was only a fair equivalent. The Leaguers, on the other hand, asserted that land was unfairly exempted from many of the fiscal burdens imposed on other

forms of property, and particularly from the probate and legacy duties. To bring the matter to an issue, Mr. Ward of Sheffield moved that a special committee should be appointed to inquire into the nature and amount of the special burdens on land: but inquiry into the truth of their allegations was just what the protectionists most dreaded, and Mr. Ward's motion was rejected by a majority of one hundred. This skirmish, however, was merely preparatory to the great battle on Mr. Villiers' annual motion for the total and immediate repeal of the Corn Laws. The first incident which gave novelty and interest to the renewed debate on this exhausted subject, was the fierce attack made by Mr. Blackstone, a leader of the uncompromising agricultural party, on what he was pleased to call "the vacillating policy of the ministers: " "I admit," said he, "that there is some truth in the statement that the tenant-farmers are in favour of a free-trade in corn. They do not hold this opinion from having any desire of a free-trade in corn, and of having all protection removed from agriculture; but I fear it is from another spirit, which I am afraid is now deeply rooted among the agriculturists—that the change affecting their interests made by her Majesty's government, has been so great, that they look to the future in a state of the utmost despair, and conceive that there is so much doubt as to the line of conduct which her Majesty's ministers will pursue hereafter, that they would rather at once see the end come, than live in suspense, and die by inches. It is probable that want of confidence in her Majesty's ministers has given rise to this opinion. There is another feeling also strongly growing upon the farmers, which I deeply regret—that they have been deceived in their attempts to save themselves from destitution by the resident gentry, the nobility, the landlords, and those whom they looked up to. The feeling is visible in Hertford, and also in Berkshire. In the petition sent up from Wallingford in

favour of protection to the farmers, I blush to say that hardly a single magistrate has subcribed his name. The magistrate and gentry have been forward to come and turn out the administration which showed such extreme hostility to the landed interest, and they were then ready enough to urge on their tenants to the same course: but now the case is different; the farmers of the country are now acting for themselves; and this I hold to be a most dangerous state of public feeling."

Sir Edward Knatchbull continued to do more mischief to the Corn Laws than any one who spoke during the debate, by defending them on the ground of their being necessary to enable landlords to support the expense of marriage-settlements, and the charges necessary to make provision for younger children.

Sir Robert Peel's speech was more than usually vague and indefinite: he defended the Corn Laws chiefly on the untenable ground of the peculiar burdens on land; and he asserted that the changes he had recently made, had operated beneficially in lowering the prices of provisions. After a debate of five nights, Mr. Villiers' motion was rejected by a majority of two hundred and fifty; but just before the division, Mr. Cobden had warned the House, that the members of the Anti-Corn-Law League would persist in their agitation until their great object, the abolition of the Corn Laws, had been fully attained.

A great step towards Free Trade was made by the ministers themselves. The Canadian legislature having, at the instigation of the home-government, agreed to impose a duty of three shillings per quarter on all wheat imported into Canada; an act was passed, admitting all wheat from Canada into English ports at a fixed duty of one shilling per quarter. The measure was more fiercely opposed by the "uncompromising agricultural party" than by the free-traders; and

from the time that it passed into a law, there was a manifest and widening schism between the uncompromising and the yielding sections of the ministerial party.

Sir Robert Peel felt himself placed in a very difficult position by the discussion of this motion. On the one hand, he was anxious that the free-traders should receive it as a great concession; but, on the other, he was not less anxious that the agriculturists should not regard it as a serious relaxation of protection. He was further embarrassed by establishing in this measure the principle of a fixed duty, being the very point on which he had ejected the Whigs from office; and he obviously winced under the charges of inconsistency which were freely levelled against him from both sides of the House. He rose under some embarrassment, and in the earlier part of his speech addressed himself in rather a deprecatory tone to his old friends the Protectionists, endeavouring to show them that the special circumstances of our connection with the Canadas rendered such a measure unavoidable; he then turned to his Whig opponents, and answered them with great asperity of manner in the following terms:

“I am taunted with adopting a fixed duty: will honourable gentlemen opposite tell me how they would deal with a fixed duty in this case? There is to be, according to their plan, a fixed duty of eight shillings a quarter on foreign corn; now, what will they do with colonial produce? I presume they would not subject that produce to a duty of the same amount? But the American corn—corn of foreign growth—comes to England through Canada; how could they levy a fixed duty of eight shillings on American corn brought from New York and New Orleans, and nevertheless permit American corn to come to this country duty-free through Canada? I should like to know how they would deal with that fact? would not that be opening a ‘back-door?’

Would not that be giving a preference to the Western States over the Southern. Or perhaps honourable gentlemen would propose to apply only a duty of one shilling to corn passing through Canada? But in this case there would be an undue preference given to America over other nations?" —The point, however, on which he mainly rested his defence of the fixed duty, was, that in Canada the duty could be taken in no other form.

After pointing out some inconsistencies in the several opinions of his opponents, Sir Robert described the circumstances of the colony when the measure was proposed. "We found a strong and almost unanimous feeling in Canada, that the greatest advantage would arise to Canada if its wheat and flour could be admitted into this country. Their two great articles of commerce were timber and corn. The Canadas differed from other provinces in being a corn-growing country, and able to export it. Their situation was peculiar. The hazardous experiment of the union of the two legislatures was tried; we looked at those things; we regarded the expenditure of 2,000,000 for suppressing the rebellion, and the cost of the twenty-two battalions of infantry to maintain peace there; we bore in mind the unsettled question on the frontier, and that we were involved in a dispute with a powerful country at a great distance from our resources; and we added to this, that the honour and security of England were not safe unless we carried with us the cordial good-will and co-operation of the people of Canada. You have professed your readiness to support your relationship with Canada, and you are bound in honour to support it; and there can be no doubt that the government, in introducing the measure, attached this important consideration to it, that it would be taken as an indication of cordial good-feeling towards Canada. And I now say, that unless you carry that cordial co-operation of the people

of Canada with you, the weakest point of the whole empire will be Canada.

" It is easy to talk of dissolving that alliance ; but in point of honour, and in point of policy, you cannot set that example. If your connection with Canada is to be dissolved, your connection with New Brunswick, with Prince Edward's Island, and with Nova Scotia may follow ; indeed, you will never be able to determine the point at which, as a matter of policy—apart from a feeling of honour—you must terminate your course. The more of ill-will, the more of dissension and unwillingness to submit to connection with this country there exists, the greater will be the temptation for foreign powers to interfere."

In conclusion, he sharply reproached the Whigs for their blunders in the government of Jamaica, and took credit to himself for respecting the rights and privileges of Colonial legislatures. His speech was clever, but not effective ; many who voted with him, loudly expressed their dissatisfaction at the course which had been adopted, and Mr. Sheil taunted the ministers with having threatened their supporters with resignation, should they persevere in their hostility to the measure. In the House of Lords, the Dukes of Richmond and Buckingham strenuously resisted the measure, which they described as little less than a breach of faith with those who had placed the ministers in office. On a division, however, the ministers had a large majority, and the measure was carried as it was originally proposed, without any alteration or amendment.

In consequence of the alarming increase of outrages in Ireland, a bill was introduced by Lord Eliot, the Irish Secretary, to compel the registration of arms in that country. Unfortunately, there were some clauses in the bill more stringent and galling than the necessity of the case required ; it was therefore resisted with a vehemence which revived all

the passions of faction. In the midst of this controversy, Mr. W. S. O'Brien proposed that “The House should resolve itself into a committee, for the purpose of taking into consideration the cause of the discontent at present existing in Ireland, with a view to the redress of grievances, and to the establishment of a system of just and impartial government in that part of the kingdom.” Mr. W. S. O'Brien introduced his motion in a speech of great temper and ability, which gave promise of a career of useful statesmanship, unfortunately contradicted by his subsequent actions and performances. The calm and practical spirit of the mover ruled the entire debate; it was in fact, though not in name, what Mr. W. S. O'Brien had asked for—a committee of the whole House calmly discussing the condition of Ireland, with an earnest anxiety to discover some means for the practical amelioration of that distracted country.

In a previous debate, Sir James Graham, referring to some demands made on the part of the Irish Catholics, had imprudently used the unhappy phrase—“Concession has reached its utmost limits.” This had been received in Ireland as a threat that the country would for the future be governed by the policy of coercion, and had been a source of fresh strength to the Repeal party. Several members reproached the Home Secretary for having offered an “intolerable insult to the Roman Catholics,” but they were disarmed by the manly candour with which Sir James Graham redressed his error, and apologized for an expression which he confessed to be unwarrantable, and which could only have escaped from him in the heat of debate. Captain Rous and the Hon. G. P. Smythe, both regular supporters of government, declared that they would vote for the motion, intimating that they believed Sir Robert Peel was prepared to do what was just and necessary, but that he was restrained by the bigotry of some of his supporters.

This point was very ably put by Lord Howick, whose speech was the most striking and effective delivered during the entire debate. “I am persuaded,” he said, “that if with all the energies of his mind, and with singleness of purpose, he devotes himself to the high task to which Providence seems to have called him, of re-organizing the disjointed frame of society in Ireland,—I do believe, if he honestly undertakes this high and noble task, with the blessing of Providence he will succeed; and even if he fail, he will win the respect and admiration of all high-minded men. But, sir, if he is content to be borne passively along the current down which he is now rapidly floating, he will be ultimately carried on with a still increasing rapidity; in his fall he will receive, not the respect but the contempt of mankind, accompanied, as it will be, by the fall of the United Empire.”

Sir Robert Peel, in a very long and able speech, vindicated the policy of the government. He was most impressive in enforcing the necessity of maintaining the rights of property in Ireland. On this point, he said—

“If you tell the possessor of wealth in Ireland, that by the purchase of land he shall not gain the uncontrollable right of property over that land, in my opinion you will strike a fatal blow at the prosperity of that country. But I speak generally of the right of property, and not of the abuse of that right; and I will not resist inquiry into the peculiarities or abuses of the Irish law. When I assert that the just rights of property ought to be respected, I am far from saying that if a remedy could be applied, to prevent the undue exercise of power in Ireland, I would not give to such a proposition the most attentive consideration. If you tell me that a tenant-at-will improves the property he occupies, relying upon the justice and generosity of his landlord, and that, having so improved that property, he gives a vote, or does some other act hostile

to the feelings of the landlord, and is ejected from his tenancy, no compensation being made to him for his outlay—if the landlord takes advantage of such hostile vote or act, for the purpose of availing himself of any benefit he may gain by taking possession of the land without affording compensation to the outgoing tenant—that is undoubtedly a gross injustice. I trust and believe that this is a case of rare occurrence, and if so, it may be difficult to apply a legislative remedy; but if such cases were of frequent occurrence, and a legislative remedy could be safely applied, I think it would be the duty of the House to afford such remedy.”

On the last night of the debate on the Arms bill, Sir Robert Peel took an opportunity of repeating his opinions on the condition of Ireland. They were worthy an enlightened statesman, but unfortunately they were addressed to those who traded in agitation, and profited by disturbance. In reply to Mr. Sheil, he said,

“ The right honourable gentleman says he is surprised at the apparent apathy and calm composure with which I view the present state of things in that country. I assure the right honourable gentleman I view that state of things with no other feelings than those of deep anxiety and pain. I know that I have done all I could. I had a hope that there was a gradual abatement of animosities on account of religious differences. I thought I saw, even in the intercourse of members of this House, a kindly and reciprocal feeling. I thought I saw the gradual influence of those laws which removed the political disabilities of Roman Catholics, and established civil equality. I thought I saw, in some respects, a great moral and social improvement; that the commercial intercourse of Ireland with this country was increasing; that there was a hope of increasing tranquillity in Ireland, and of a diminution of crime; that the redundant and superfluous capital of this country, which was seeking

a vent in foreign speculations of the most precarious nature, would be applied to a sphere more legitimate and more productive—the increasing improvement of Ireland. The agitation has blasted all those hopes."

That agitation was about to be renewed in a fierer form, and with far more injurious and permanent effects. But before entering into this melancholy history, there are some minor measures of the session which must not be passed over without remark. Among the steps in the direction of commercial relaxation sanctioned by the government, was the removal of all restrictions on the exportation of machinery. This was rather a severe trial of the sincerity of the Free-traders of Manchester, who saw that their French rivals would now be enabled to obtain, on equal terms, all those mechanical improvements and inventions on which their superiority in production mainly depended. They bore the trial better than could reasonably have been expected; a few murmured in secret, but the great majority submitted, in the hope that such a concession would make their claim to a repeal of the Corn Laws irresistible. This was felt also by the Protectionists, and they made a stand against the measure; but their resistance was feeble, and the bill easily passed through both Houses of Parliament.

Similar success did not attend the ministerial measure for the education of the children in factories. As framed by Sir James Graham, it gave a preponderating influence to the Established Church; this roused the whole body of Dissenters from one end of the land to the other. An unprecedented number of petitions was presented against the measure, and finally, the clamour was so great, that it was altogether abandoned.

Thus ended a session of very long debates, attended by very few and inefficient results. In the course of it, however, the cause of Free-Trade had made great progress; its

principles had been recognized by the ministry ; most of its opponents had abandoned the high ground on which they previously advocated protection ; and in every successive debate, its supporters found their influence in the House very sensibly increased. The popularity and power of the League had been greatly augmented from the time that it made London the centre of its operations. Soon after parliament rose, the Council of the League hired the great theatre of Covent-Garden, and commenced a series of periodical meetings, in which speeches and lectures on the fallacies of protection, and the blessings of Free-Trade, were delivered by some of the most able economists and eloquent speakers of the age. At these meetings the stage was fitted up as a saloon ; a small platform was prepared for the speakers, and the boxes, pit, and gallery, to which admission was given by ticket, were crowded by enthusiastic and attentive audiences, who came to receive instruction, and whose demeanour exhibited the order and attention of persons who felt themselves engaged in a contest, of which reason and argument should alone decide the issue. At the first of these meetings an account was given of the expenditure of the first great League Fund of £50,000, which had been raised by subscription. Among the speeches delivered, there was one by Mr. W. J. Fox, (since member for Oldham,) which produced a most thrilling effect on the country. Extracts from it were widely circulated, and eagerly sought ; we shall quote a passage, which was translated into several modern languages, and highly eulogized by the admirers of genuine eloquence in both hemispheres. " It is something—it is much to many here, in this vast and brilliant assemblage—that from day to day the pressure upon their circumstances is rendered more and more hard by the artificial limitations of trade : it is something—it is much to many here—that from time to time one hostile

tariff after another makes its appearance, shutting us out of markets upon the Continent, which had been open: it is something—it is much to many here, that in the most frequented thoroughfares of this great metropolis, house after house should be shut up, exhibiting a spectacle of desolation where once were thriving tradesmen and enjoying families: it is something—it is much to many here, that the pressure comes at each extremity, that the candle is burning at both ends—on one side they are exhausted by paying to the relief of the poor, and on the other, they are plundered by claims upon them for the income tax. It is something—it is much to many here, that through every station, in every rank of life, the pressure is felt—the demon seems to be omnipresent, and they cannot escape his pestiferous influence. But even this is not the deadliest influence of the Corn Laws. Did one want to exhibit it in this great theatre, it might be done—not by calling together such an audience as I now see here, but by going out into the by-places, the alleys, the dark courts, the garrets and cellars, of this metropolis, and by bringing thence their wretched and famished inmates. One might crowd them here—boxes, pit, and galleries—with their shrunk and shrivelled forms, with their wan and pallid cheeks, with their distressful looks—perhaps with dark and bitter passions pictured in their countenances—and thus exhibit a scene that would appal the stoutest heart and melt the hardest—a scene that we would wish to bring the prime minister upon the stage to see—and we would say to him—‘There, delegate of majesty! leader of legislators! conservator of institutions! look upon that mass of misery! That is what your laws and power, if they did not create, have failed to prevent, have failed to cure or mitigate.’ And supposing this to be done, could this scene be realized—we know what would be said—we should be told, ‘There

has always been poverty in the world—there are numerous ills that laws can neither make nor cure ; whatever is done, much distress must exist.' They will say, 'It is the mysterious dispensation of Providence, and there we must leave it.' I would say to the premier, if he used such argument, Hypocrite ! hypocrite ! urge not that plea yet, you have no right to it. Strike off every fetter upon industry ; take the last grain of the poison of monopoly out of the cup of poverty ; give labour its full rights, throw open the markets of the world to an industrious people ; and then, if, after all, there be poverty, you have earned your right to qualify for the unenviable dignity of a blasphemer of Providence."

From first to last the earnest attention and strong enthusiasm of the meeting was sustained ; but it was only a forerunner of many demonstrations of a similar character, such as could not take place without a deep impression upon the public mind, and upon the government of the country. The unexpected death of Sir Matthew Wood, in the end of September, 1843, creating a vacancy for the City of London, an opportunity was afforded for testing the strength which the principles of Free-trade had acquired in the city of London. Mr. James Pattison, who had previously represented London, but had been defeated at the general election, came forward as the candidate of the League, in opposition to Mr. T. Baring, who was put forward by the Conservatives. Every possible exertion was made by both parties ; the orators and lecturers of the League held public meetings in every ward ; the agents of Baring proffered bribes to the poorer and more corrupt portion of the constituency. The election took place on the 21st of October, and ended in the return of Mr. Pattison by a majority of 165, after one of the closest struggles ever remembered in the city.

The former subscription of £50,000 being exhausted, the

council of the League resolved to raise a second fund of £100,000: many who had hitherto abstained from taking any part in the movement, now came forward, and among them was the eminent banker, Mr. Samuel Jones Lloyd, whose example produced a powerful effect on all the mercantile interests in London. At the first meeting held in Manchester for raising the new League Fund, thirteen thousand seven hundred pounds were subscribed in the room, and the *Times*, which had hitherto sneered at the movement, made the significant announcement, “THE LEAGUE IS A GREAT FACT.”

In the meantime, the increasing distress and discontent of the agricultural labourers, for whose benefit the Corn Laws were said to have been established, practically refuted one of the strongest arguments on which the Protectionists relied. At a meeting of labourers, this favourite excuse for the maintenance of monopoly, was for ever overthrown by a poor peasant whose faded form, hollow cheeks, and attenuated limbs were irrefutable proofs of the extremity of his sufferings; in a hollow piercing voice he exclaimed—“*I be protected, and I be starving.*” Cause and effect so obviously conjoined, produced an impression which no subsequent sophistry could efface. The alarming increase of incendiary fires gave further proof of the distress and dissatisfaction of the agricultural population, while the cities began to feel severely the pressure of the starving paupers that crowded to them from the rural districts. Thus darkly closed the year 1843 in England; but even still more perilous were its last months in Ireland, to which we must now briefly direct our attention.

The Repeal agitation assumed a new and formidable aspect in 1843; immense masses of the Irish people were assembled at meetings held in the open air, and denominated “monster meetings,” for the avowed purpose of overawing the govern-

ment by a display of physical force. Some of the Roman Catholic prelates, and a very large number of the inferior ranks of the priesthood, took part in these demonstrations, and did not scruple to use language as violent and as factious as the lay-agitators. Peace and tranquillity, it is true, were constantly prescribed in words ; but such formal exhortations were, of course, likely to prove weak antidotes against the strongly stimulating language with which the feelings of the hearers had been previously stirred up, and the thinly-disguised suggestions by which hostility to the English legislature was inculcated as the first duty of patriotism. On the 15th of August, there was an immense muster, computed at about half a million of persons, at a place called Tara—rendered famous by the beautiful lines of Moore—

“ The harp that once through Tara’s halls,” &c.

This spot appears to have been selected for the meeting on a double account. It was the place where the ancient monarchs of Ireland were elected previous to the Anglo-Norman invasion ; and it had been the scene of a battle during the outbreak of 1798, in which the insurgents were defeated. Mr. O’Connell here “ spoke out ” unequivocal significance. Impunity had made him incautious, and he now seemed to think himself above the law, whose terrors he had so often braved with success. Many of his hearers believed that he had finally made up his mind to encounter the risk of a revolution, and probably there were moments when he had almost nerved himself to the hazard. Addressing the immense multitude, he said :—

“ Yes, the overwhelming majesty of your multitude will be taken to England, and will have its effect there. The Duke of Wellington began by threatening us. He talked of civil war ; but he does not say a single word about that now. He is now getting eyelet-holes made in the old barracks. And only think of an old general doing such a thing—just as if

.we were going to break our heads against stone-walls ! I am glad to find that a great quantity of brandy and biseuit has been lately imported, and I hope the poor soldiers will get some of them. But the Duke of Wellington is now talking of attaeking us, and I am glad of it. But I tell him this, I mean no disrespeet to the brave, the gallant, and the well-conducted soldiers that compose the Queen's army, and all of them that we have in this country are exeedingly well conducted. There is not one of you that has a single complaint to make against any of them.

“They are the bravest army in the world, and therefore I do not mean to disparage them at all: but I feel it to be a faet, that Ireland, roused as she is at the present moment, would, if they made war upon us, furnish women enough to beat the entire of the Queen's forcees. At the last fight for Ireland, when she was betrayed by having eonfide in England's honour—but, oh ! English honour will never again betray our land, for the man would deserve to be betrayed who would eonfide again in England. I would as soon eonfide in the cousin-german of a certain personage having two horns and a hoof. At that last battle, the Irish soldiers, after three days' fighting, being attacked by fresh troops, faltered and gave way, and 1,500 of the British army entered the breach. The Irish soldiers were fainting and retiring, when the women of Limeriek threw themselves between the contending forcees, and aetually stayed the progress of the advaneing army. See how we have accumulated the people of Ireland for this Repeal year. When, on the 2nd of January, I ventured to eall it the Repeal year, every person laughed at me. Are they laughing now ? It is our turn to laugh at present. Before twelve months more, the parliament will be in College Green. I said the Union did not take away from the people of Ireland their legal rights. I told you that the Union did not deprive the people of that

right, or take away the authority to have self-legislation. It has not lessened the prerogatives of the crown, or taken away the rights of the sovereign, and amongst them is the right to call her parliament wherever the people are entitled to it; and the people of Ireland are entitled to have it in Ireland, and the Queen has only to-morrow to issue her writs, and get the chancellor to seal them; and if Sir E. Sugden does not sign them, she will soon get an Irishman who will, to revive the Irish parliament. The towns which sold their birthright have no right to be reckoned amongst the towns sending members to parliament.

“ King James I., in one day, created forty boroughs in Ireland ; and the Queen has the same right as her predecessors to do so. We have a list of the towns to return members—the counties, as a matter of course, will return them—according to their population, and the Queen has only to order writs to issue, and to have honest ministers to advise her to issue those writs, and the Irish parliament is revived by its own energy, and the force of the Queen’s prerogative. I will only require the Queen to exercise her prerogative, and the Irish people will obtain their nationality again. If, at the present moment, the Irish parliament was in existence, even as it stood in 1800, is there a coward amongst you—is there a wretch amongst you so despicable, that he would not die rather than allow the Union to pass ? Let every man who, if we had an Irish parliament, would rather die than allow the Union to pass, lift up his hands. Yes, the Queen will call that parliament. You may say it is the act of the ministry, if you please. To be sure, it would be the act of her ministry, and the people of Ireland are entitled to have their friends appointed to the ministry. The Irish parliament will then assemble, and I defy all the generals, old and young, and all the old women in pantaloons—nay, I defy all the chivalry of the earth—to take away that

parliament from us again. Give me 3,000,000 of repealers, and I will soon have them. The next step is being taken, and I announce to you from this spot, that all the magistrates that have been deprived of the commission of the peace, shall be appointed by the Association to settle all the disputes and differences in their neighbourhoods. Keep out of the petty sessions court, and go not to them. On next Monday we will submit a plan to choose persons to be arbitrators, to settle the differences of the people without expense; and I call on every man who wishes to be thought the friend of Ireland, to have his dispute settled by the arbitrators, and not again to go to the petty sessions. We shall shortly have the Preservative Society, to arrange the means of procuring from her Majesty the exercise of her prerogative; and I believe I am able to announce to you, that twelve months cannot possibly elapse without having an Hurrah for our parliament in College Green! Remember, I pronounce the Union to be null—to be obeyed as an injustice; must be obeyed where it is supported by law, until we have the royal authority to set the matter right, and substitute our own parliament."

At the Repeal Association, Mr. O'Connell produced an "instrument of government," prepared by himself, to be adopted in Ireland after the act of Union had been rescinded; and he still more glaringly violated the prerogatives of the crown, by recommending the establishment of Arbitration Courts, to supersede the ordinary tribunals for the administration of justice. Finally, he vehemently attacked the Queen's speech at the close of the session, and issued a manifesto in opposition to it, which, after enumerating many real and fancied Irish grievances, declared that there was no hope of obtaining redress of those grievances from the British parliament, by any legal or constitutional means; and the mode by which he recommended them to be reme-

died, was pointed out in terms not to be misunderstood. In fact, he did everything short of proclaiming open war against the government and all recognized authorities.

Passing over the proceedings of several “monster meetings,” distinguished from each other only by the increasing boldness of the language used by the orators, and the nearer approximation to an open avowal of designs hostile to the law and to the public peace, we shall proceed to the event which put a stop to these proceedings. A grand meeting had been announced for the 8th of October, to be held at a place called Clontarf, within three miles of Dublin, the scene of a celebrated victory gained by the Irish over the Danes. The programme of the proceedings and the regulations to be observed by those who were to attend the meeting, had been announced with unusual ostentation and solemnity; military discipline was gravely imitated, and the arrangements looked as if they were designed rather for the marshalling of an army, than the direction of a peaceful meeting.

This was an extent of intimidation to which no government could submit. A meeting of the privy council was held at the Castle of Dublin, on the evening of the 7th of October, and a proclamation was issued prohibiting the proposed meeting, and menacing with legal consequences those who persevered in assembling. Mr. O’Connell at once summoned a special meeting of the Repeal Association, and issued a manifesto, exhorting the people to obey the Vice-regal proclamation.

The interference of government at this crisis, was a signal relief to Mr. O’Connell himself. He found that the monster meetings were becoming unmanageable, and that the guidance of the Repeal movement was slipping from his hands. A party, known as Young Ireland, had grown up around him, chiefly young men whose fiery spirits could not be controlled

by the cold and cautious spirit of their leader. They whispered that O'Connell equivocated with Repeal,—that he was ready to abandon the cry, as he had done before, to secure other political advantages, and they were eager to have him so deeply compromised that the struggle for Repeal should become a stern reality, and that the retreat of the leader should be an impossibility. This was a situation involving grave and perilous responsibilities, from which O'Connell had made more than one vigorous but vain effort to extricate himself. Hence arose the ardour with which he seconded the proclamation for the prevention of the meeting, and sent out emissaries on the principal roads, to turn back those who might be coming to attend it.

The government prepared to follow up its new vigorous policy by further decisive measures. On the 14th of October, Mr. O'Connell, his son John, and his principal coadjutors, were arrested on charges of conspiracy, sedition, and unlawful assembling. They were of course liberated on bail, but O'Connell had been thoroughly alarmed, and from this time began to exhibit the most unequivocal symptoms of surrender and retraction. He would probably not have been disinclined to enter into a compromise with the government; but Earl de Grey and his advisers seemed resolved by excessive rigour to make atonement for their excessive apathy in the previous part of the year, and they urged forward the prosecution with a portentous energy, which was far from giving confidence to those truly interested in the welfare of Ireland. The indictment they prepared was a curiosity in its way; it contained eleven counts, and extended over ninety-seven feet of parchment. After a long scene of legal battling, it was decided that the trial should take place in the month of January, 1844.

A more peaceful, but a not less remarkable movement disturbed the public mind in Scotland. The ultra-Presbyterians

having failed to set aside the authority claimed by the law-courts to regulate disputed ecclesiastical appointments, and having equally failed to obtain the abolition of lay-patronage, seceded in a body from the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, and constituted themselves the "Free Presbyterian Church," electing as their Moderator, the Rev. Dr. Chalmers, to whom, for the moment, the attention of all Christendom was directed. This was a schism of the most vital and dangerous kind. The seceders carried with them some of the best blood of the national church; they left her shorn not only of a large portion of her numerical strength among all classes of the population, from the head of the house of Breadalbane, down to the humble hut of the meanest peasant, but also deprived her of a host of the most esteemed and valued names among her ministers, including several of the highest reputation for learning, eloquence, and piety.

A different kind of commotion was excited in South Wales by the heavy and vexatious tolls demanded at the turnpike-gates. The peasants commenced a crusade against these gates, and named themselves "Children of Rebecca," from a strange and preposterous misapplication of a passage in the book of Genesis: "And they blessed Rebecca, and said unto her, Let thy seed possess the gate of those which hate them." Gen. xxiv. 60.—The outrages of the Rebeccaites were not confined to the destruction of turnpike gates; guns were fired into the houses of persons who had incurred the popular displeasure; property was injured, and life became insecure. At length it was found necessary to send large bodies of military and police into the disturbed districts; confidence was thus restored to the magistrates, and by a judicious mixture of firmness and concession, the commotions were finally suppressed.

## CHAPTER VII.

## THE DIFFICULTIES OF THE PEEL MINISTRY.

A LITTLE before the opening of the session of parliament in 1844, the following whimsical, but accurate description of the position of the premier and the condition of the country, appeared in the *League* newspaper. Its fidelity was attested by its being quoted into the principal journals, not only of the British empire, but also those of France, Germany, and the United States; we, therefore, feel justified in giving it insertion:—

“‘ The vessel of the state drifts onward without rudder or compass;’ the marines appear to have taken her out of the hands of the sailors, and to have chosen a fresh-water pilot, whose only principle of navigation is to keep close *by the land*. The poor pilot, seeing rocks ahead, and breakers under his lee, casts a longing eye seaward, and seems to wish for a chance of running free into the Trade-winds, instead of dodging about under the flaws and gusts alongshore. If danger comes suddenly, from his absurd steering, he dreads being pitched overboard by the sailors, whose League is formidable—if he quits the narrow seas, he fears an insurrection of the lubberly marines, who are beginning to prate about mutiny. At the very moment that the ship is about to make a new tack, none of the crew can conjecture to what point of the compass the pilot will turn her head; the marines hope that he will hug the land, but have secret misgivings because he has lately taken soundings, though the sailors say that this was only ‘ bobbing for flats;’ some of the young

tars say that he has been treading on their corns, which they take to be a hint that he only waits for the turn of the tide; but the old blue-jackets shake their heads, look anxiously at the sky, and talk of a pilot who 'gathered the storm,' which his flatterers said he 'weathered;' under whose steering the Old England had a narrow escape from the unfathomable pit. Doubt and distrust are spread from stem to stern, and the pilot, though once deemed a good hand at 'spinning a yarn,' has only once opened his oracular jaws, and was then delivered of a bull, so that those who used to cry up his wit as sterling, are now forced to confess that it was mere Brummagem.

"But this is a faint type of the condition of England at the present moment: there is uncertainty everywhere, and confidence nowhere; the tenant hesitates to conclude an agreement with his landlord; the retailer pauses in perplexity before sending an order to the wholesale dealer; the exporting merchant is perplexed by hostile tariffs; and the importer, instead of consulting commercial lists, finds that his best guide is a weather-almanack. In this state of doubt, men interpret the uncertain sign of the times according to their own preconceived opinions, just as Brunswickers and Emancipators did in 1828. The Duke of Buccleuch, having duly paid his respects to 'the father of lies,' gives £100 to the protection of monopoly, but it is remembered that Sir Charles Wetherell was similarly permitted to parade ascendancy principles after the concessions of 1829 had been determined upon by the cabinet; and the descendant of the moss-troopers, like the representative of the obstinates, is said to be allowed to exhibit his vagaries merely as a diversion. In truth they are well calculated to afford diversion, from Caithness to Cornwall.

"Some of the monopolists point to the landlord associations for the protection of rent, into which efforts are made to dupe, or coerce the tenantry, and say,—'Here are pledges

to the maintenance of the sliding scale ;' but the wiser of the party aver that the sudden fit of speaking and writing which has seized on the lords of mortgaged acres is the worst symptom of their cause. ' All would be well,' they say, ' if the blockheads could only be persuaded to hold their tongues ; these are not the days when the cackling of geese will save the capitol.' On the other hand, the Free-traders adopt the hortatory strains of the emancipating bard, and earnestly pray :—

' Write on, write on, ye barons dear,  
Ye dukes write hard and fast !  
The good we've sought for many a year  
Your quills will bring at last.  
Sure, never since the precious use  
Of pen and ink began,  
Did letters writ by fools produce  
Such precious good to man !

' Write, write, ye peers, nor stoop to style,  
Nor beat for sense about ;—  
Squires, think not reason worth your while,  
But still your nonsense spout.  
Oh, ne'er since asses spoke before  
Such miracles were done ;  
Make but a few such speeches more,  
And Free-Trade's cause is won :

" Verily, Moore's verses may serve as a prologue to the great drama of legislation now about to begin, whether it will turn out a farce, or a tragedy, or an extravaganza compounded of both. The manager has collected so heterogeneous a company, has so studiously kept away his ' stars ' from rehearsals, and has made so many blunders with his suits, that we dare not attempt to speculate on the pieces he intends to produce, until after the rising of the curtain. We shall carefully watch the production, for we have strong evidence to prove that the House has been packed : indeed Sir Robert Peel's management has always been distinguished by a liberal distribution of ' orders.'"

The truth of this description was contested : an increase in the revenue and a marked revival of trade had re-animated the spirits of the community, and added popular strength to the ministers by the credit which this prosperous reaction reflected on their measures; yet viewed with reference, not to the people, but to party, the state of affairs at the opening of the session of 1844 is very fairly portrayed in the article from which we have extracted the most graphic parts.. Sir Robert Peel, having tested the value of Free Trade by his recent reductions in the tariff, was anxious to make further advances in the same direction, but was deterred by the dissatisfaction and disaffection which the changes already made had introduced into the ranks of his supporters. At several agricultural meetings, he was openly accused of having abandoned the cause of protection, by means of which he had been raised to power ; at others, hints were thrown out that the time had come for choosing a new Conservative leader, and Lord Stanley was designated as the statesman best qualified for that office. On the other hand, Sir Robert Peel had displayed more than usual reserve with his party previous to the assembling of parliament ; he had refused to attend any public dinners where the interests of agriculture were likely to be discussed, and in private circles had evaded every effort made to obtain from him a declaration of his future intentions. His first declaration was made in the address in reference to Lord John Russell's remark, that it would be dangerous to apply principles abstractedly right, at the hazard of occasioning great disturbance of capital, and injury to existing arrangements. On this point, the premier said,—

“ In that general principle I do certainly concur. I believe the abolition of the Corn Laws would produce great confusion and distress. There is, however, this difference between us —the difference between the fixed duty and the graduated

scale. Now, here I retain my own opinions. Agreeing, in the general principle I have stated, with the noble lord, he proposes to secure his protection by a fixed duty; and he says members of parliament are liable to the invidious imputation of being actuated by personal interests in advocating the sliding scale. Surely the same suspicion attaches to the fixed-duty plan. The noble lord might say he proposed it for revenue; but if carried high enough, he knows that, however intended, operate it would as protection, and that he would find it difficult to resist the argument. Why, if you impose a duty on foreign corn, should it not be equally imposed on domestic corn? Sir, I stated last year that the government were not prepared to alter the existing Corn Law, but when pressed to make a declaration on the part of the government, that at all times, and under all circumstances, I would adhere to the law existing, I said, such a declaration would be inconsistent with our duty to the country and the crown. I do not repeat this for the purpose of securing any escape for the government. The noble lord says, we may maintain the law, or repeal it, but that it is impossible we should adopt a fixed duty. Sir, I do not exactly know what may be impossible (laughter). Sir, I hope those who laugh do not thereby imply an opinion that I am making reservations. Whenever the opinions of the agriculturists take that extraordinary turn which sometimes it has been represented they have already taken, in favour of a fixed duty, I am inclined to think that the noble lord will be the party to propose such a measure, and not myself. The experience we have had of the present law has not shaken my preference for a graduated duty; and although I consider it inconsistent with my duty to make engagements for adherence to existing laws under all circumstances, in order to conciliate support, I can say that the government have never contemplated, and do not contemplate, any alteration

in the existing law. The prices of corn since the law came into operation, have been as fixed as at any prior period, and as moderate. They have varied only from fifty to fifty-two shillings for the last four or five months; and the prices for fifty-four years past have been in only seven years lower than the average prices for the last few months; in all the remaining forty-seven years the prices were higher; consequently, neither on account of immoderate nor of varying prices have we found any reason to change our opinion as to the existing law. The government, I repeat, should not bind themselves by any declarations, adherence to which might be inconsistent with duty; but I again declare they never contemplated, and do not at present contemplate, any alteration in the law."

This declaration, though apparently explicit and emphatic, gave satisfaction to no party. The Free-traders believed that Peel had yielded to the dictation of his agricultural supporters, contrary to the conviction of his own judgment; and the agriculturists very loudly complained that he had refused to give them more than an assurance of temporary security. The fact was, that Sir Robert Peel had resolved to advance in his career of relaxing commercial restrictions, but that he had equally resolved not to advance faster than he would be supported by an unmistakable strength of public opinion in so doing. While professing himself "a Free-trader in the abstract," he still upheld protection in detail, and this discrepancy between profession and practice, gave an appearance of weakness and vacillation in the cabinet, which began silently to sap the influence it had acquired in the country.

The administration of India, and particularly the recent conquest of Scinde, gave rise to much warm discussion in parliament, but the policy of the government was sanctioned by large majorities. All danger from this quarter seemed to be over, when the country was suddenly startled by the announcement that the court of directors had taken the

unusual step of recalling the Governor-General, in direct opposition to the wishes of the cabinet. Sir Henry Hardinge, with the unanimous approbation of all parties, was appointed successor to Lord Ellenborough; and before that nobleman returned to England, there had been a kind of tacit agreement that the differences between the cabinet and the court of directors should be buried in oblivion.

But all the perplexities produced by the affairs of India sunk into insignificance when compared with the excitement produced by the trial of O'Connell and his associates in Ireland. It began on the 16th of January. The speech of the Attorney-General, Smith, (since Master of the Rolls) occupied two entire days, and nine more were spent in hearing the oral and documentary evidence for the prosecution. From the twelfth to the nineteenth day the eloquent lawyers retained for the defence exhibited a greater array of legal acuteness and oratorical power than had ever been displayed on any similar occasion. This part of the proceedings was, however, interrupted by an extraordinary incident: the Attorney-General, deeming himself personally wronged by one of the counsel for the defence, Mr. Fitzgibbon, actually sent a challenge to that gentleman in open court, and was not persuaded to withdraw it until the scandal was made known to the public. It was not until the 12th of February that the trial was brought to a close, when the jury found the prisoners guilty on some counts of the indictment, and acquitted them on others.

During the interval between the conviction and the final judgment of the court, Mr. O'Connell attended his parliamentary duties in England, and took part in one of the great Anti-Corn-Law Meetings held by the League in Covent Garden Theatre. Never in his life did he meet a more enthusiastic reception than that which was given to him on this occasion by an English audience. To the last

hour of his life he spoke of it as the most gratifying testimony of sympathy and approbation which he had received during the course of his whole political life. Nearly at the same time, Lord John Russell brought the course of ministerial policy towards Ireland under the consideration of the House of Commons, in a speech which occupied three hours in its delivery, and led to a protracted debate extending over nine nights. One of the most striking speeches in the debate was that of Mr. Sheil: we quote part of his peroration, to which recent events have given the character of prophecy, though the prediction it contains may have been merely an oratorical flourish hazarded in the heat of debate.

“ Almost every year we have a debate in this house touching the wrongs of Poland, and an assurance is given by the right honourable baronet that he will use his best endeavours to procure a mitigation of the sufferings of Poland—to procure justice to Poland. I have sometimes thought that, in case Lord Aberdeen should venture on any vehement expostulation, which is not, however, very likely, Count Nesselrode might ask, whether Russia had not adopted the example of England towards Ireland; whether, in Ireland, torrents of blood had not been poured out by your forefathers; whether Ireland had not been put through a process of repeated confiscation; whether the laws of Russia were more detestable than your barbarous penal code; and whether, to this day, you do not persevere in maintaining an ecclesiastical institution repugnant to the interests, utterly at variance with the creed, and abhorrent to the feelings, of the vast majority of the people? Such, I think, would be the just reply of a Russian statesman to my Lord Aberdeen; and, since I have named my Lord Aberdeen, I gladly avail myself of the opportunity to express my unqualified approbation of his foreign policy. As long as the home-office plays, in reference to Ireland, so belligerent a part, and when the Secretary of the

Colonies, in speaking of Ireland, ‘stiffens the sinews,’ and ‘summons up the blood,’ and, I may venture to add, imitates the action of the tiger, nothing will become my Lord Aberdeen so much as ‘mild behaviour and humility.’ Rightly did my Lord Ashburton, under his auspices, concede to America far more than America could plausibly claim. Rightly will he relinquish the Oregon territory; rightly has he endured the intrigues of the French cabinet in Spain; rightly did he speak of Algiers as a ‘*fait accompli*.’ Rightly will he abandon the treaties of 1831 and 1833 for the suppression of the slave trade; but, after all, this prudential complaisance may be ultimately of little avail; for who can rely upon the sincerity of that international friendship, which rests on no better basis than the interchange of royal civilities? *Who can rely upon the stability of that throne of the barricades, which has neither legitimacy for its foundation, nor freedom for its prop? And if it falls, how fearful may be the consequences that grow out of its ruins!* The first lord of the treasury will then have cause to revert to his speech of 1829, to which my honourable and learned friend the member for Worcester so emphatically and so impressively adverted. The admonitions of the noble lord the member for Sunderland would then be deserving of regard. These topics are perilous, but I do not fear to touch them. It is my thorough conviction, that England would be able to put down any insurrectionary movement, with her gigantic force, even although, maddened and frantic, Ireland might submit to be aided by calculating France. But at what a terrible cost of treasure and of life would treason be subdued. Well might the Duke of Wellington, well might the hero of a hundred fights, although familiar with fields of death, express his horror at the contemplation of civil war. War in Ireland would be worse than civil. A demon would take possession of the nation’s heart—every feeling of humanity would be

extinguished—neither to sex nor to age would mercy be given. The country would be deluged with blood; and when that deluge had subsided, what a waste would be disclosed! It would be a sorry consolation to a British statesman, when he gazed upon the spectacle of desolation which Ireland would then present to him, that he beheld the spires of your established church still standing secure amidst the desert with which they would be encompassed. You have adjured us, in the name of the oath which we have sworn on the gospel of God—I adjure you, in the name of every precept contained in that holy book—in the name of that religion which is the perfection of humanity—in the name of every obligation divine and human, as you are men and Christians, to save my country from those evils to which I point but to avert them, and to remember that, if you shall be the means of precipitating that country into perdition, posterity will deliver its great ‘finding’ against you, and that you will not only be answerable to posterity, but responsible to that Judge in whose presence, clothed with the blood of civil warfare, it will be more than dreadful to appear. But God forbid that these evils should ever have any other existence except in my own affrighted imaginings, and that these visions of disaster should be embodied in reality. God grant that the men to whom the destinies of England are confided by their sovereign, may have the virtue and the wisdom to save her from those fearful ills that so darkly and so densely lower upon her. For my own part, I do not despair of my country, I do not despair of witnessing the time when Ireland will cease to be the battle-field of faction; when our mutual aerimonies will be laid aside; when our fatal antipathies will be sacrificed to the good genius of our country. Within the few days that have elapsed since my return to England, I have seen enough to convince me that there exists amidst a large portion of the great British community,

a sentiment of kindness and of good feeling towards Ireland. I have seen proof that Englishmen, with a generous promptitude, if they have felt themselves wronged, forgive the man who may have done them wrong. That if Englishmen, noble and high-minded Englishmen, do but conjecture that injustice has been done to a political antagonist, swayed by their passion for fair play, they will fly to his succour, and, with an instinct of magnanimity, enthusiastically take his part. I do trust that this exalted sentiment will be appreciated by my countrymen as it ought to be; and that it may be so appreciated, and that it may lead to a perfect national reconciliation, and that both countries, instead of being fostered by a mere parliament union—a mere legal ligament, which an event may snap—shall be morally, politically, and socially identified, is the ardent desire of one who has many faults, who is conscious of numerous imperfections, but who, whatever those imperfections may be, is not reckless of the real interests of his country, is devotedly attached to his sovereign; and, so far from wishing for a dismemberment of this majestic empire, offers up a prayer, as fervent as ever passed from the heart to the lips of any one of you, that the greatness of that empire may be imperishable, and that the power, and that the affluence, and that the glory, and that, above all, the liberties of England, may endure for ever."

Sir Robert Peel replied with great spirit: he showed that his government had done nothing to provoke the Repeal agitation, and pointed out how injurious to the tranquillity and prosperity of Ireland that agitation had become. He referred with great emotion to the sacrifices he had made for Ireland, when, in order to carry the Emancipation act, and, as he had hoped, to ensure her tranquillity, he had risked private friendships and political connexions, and had forfeited the cherished representation of that University,

where his earliest ambition had been gratified. In conclusion, he said :—

“ I have a firm conviction, that if there were a calm and tranquillity in Ireland, there is no part of the British empire that would make such rapid progress in improvement. There are facilities for improvement, and opportunities for it, which will make the advance of Ireland more rapid than the advance of any other country. I will conclude then by expressing my sincere and earnest hope, that this agitation, and all the evil consequences of it, may be permitted to subside, and hereafter, in whatever capacity I may be, I should consider that the happiest day of my life, when I could see the beloved sovereign of these realms fulfilling the fondest wishes of her heart—possessing a feeling of affection towards all her people, but mingling that affection with sympathy and tenderness towards Ireland. I should hail the dawning of that auspicious day when she could alight, like some benignant spirit, on the shores of Ireland, and lay the foundations of a temple of peace—when she could, in accents that proceeded from the heart, spoken to the heart rather than to the ear—call upon her Irish subjects, of all classes and of all denominations, Protestants and Roman Catholics, Saxon and Celt, to forget the difference of creed and of race, and to hallow that temple of peace which she would then found, with sacrifices still holier than those by which the temples of old were hallowed—by the sacrifice of those evil passions that dishonour our common faith, and prevent the union of heart and hand in defence of our common country.”

A measure of considerable importance to the Catholics of Ireland was conceded by the government in the present session ; its object was to make provision for the security and regulation of property bequeathed for charitable and religious purposes. It was opposed only by a violent portion

of the Catholic hierarchy in Ireland, which had joined O'Connell's agitation, and which had surpassed the lay-agitators in violence of language and perverseness of purpose. Several of the obsolete penal laws against Popery were at the same time repealed, and it was semi-officially announced that ministers had resolved to adopt a more conciliatory policy in Ireland for the future. But their course was greatly impeded by the O'Connell trial; for on the 30th of May the traversers were called up for judgment, and sentenced to fine and imprisonment. It was rather a dangerous experiment to send so popular a leader as O'Connell to prison; but the peace of Ireland was not disturbed, though great sympathy was shown for the captive. The verdict of the jury was ultimately set aside by the House of Lords; O'Connell was restored to liberty, but he did not venture to repeat the perilous experiment of monster meetings. The ministers, relieved from much perplexity by the liberation of O'Connell, recalled Lord de Grey from Ireland, and appointed Lord Heytesbury viceroy in his stead.

A measure proposed for the regulation of labour in factories created some embarrassment to the government. Lord Ashley proposed a clause for limiting the hours of adult labour, which was carried against the ministers by a small majority. Sir James Graham then abandoned the bill, but another was subsequently introduced, restricting the hours of labour for women and children, but leaving the question of adult males untouched: it passed after much angry discussion, though with little real opposition.

A more perilous ministerial crisis arose on the question of the sugar-duties. The Free-traders had long complained of the absurdity of levying a discriminating duty on slave-grown sugar, when no other slave-grown produce, such as coffee or cotton, was thus fiscally distinguished. They urged the government to abandon such a principle, and the minis-

ters so far yielded as to lower the duty on the foreign sugars of nations with whom England had commercial treaties. While the Free-traders were thus dissatisfied, Mr. Miles, an ultra-Protectionist, proposed an apparent reduction of the sugar-duties, but what in effect would have been an additional protective duty in favour of colonial sugar. The Whigs and several Free-traders joined Mr. Miles: his amendment was carried by a majority of twenty, and it was generally supposed that the ministry would resign. They must certainly have done so, had the House of Commons maintained its decision; but when it again assembled, the ministerial project was sanctioned by a majority of twenty-two, and Mr. Miles made no effort to renew his amendment.

This speedy reversal of its vote rather lowered the character of the House in the estimation of the country. It was severely censured by Mr. D'Israeli, who had recently begun to take a prominent part among the ultra-Protectionists, and was particularly conspicuous for the caustic severity of his attacks upon Sir Robert Peel. "The right honourable baronet," he said, "had adopted certain opinions of a very decided character with respect to slavery, and he told the House, cheap sugar was of such importance, that the existence of his ministry depended upon it, and that the character of his supporters must be sacrificed to preserve his ministry. Twenty-four months had only elapsed, and the right honourable baronet came forward with a detestation of slavery in every place, except in the benesches behind him. If the anti-slavery repugnance were only a little more prevalent—if the right honourable baronet did not expect upon every division, and at every crisis, that his gang should appear, and the whip should sound, with the alacrity which it is understood is now prevalent—it would be a little more consistent with that tone which he assumed with respect to the slave-trade, and with that which is now the principal

subject of discussion. It is better for the House of Commons and for the right honourable baronet that this system should at once terminate. He deserves a better position than one that can only be maintained by menacing his friends, and cringing to his opponents."

Similar reproaches were subsequently addressed to the premier by Mr. T. Duncombe; to whom Sir Robert Peel replied in the following terms:—"I did no doubt mean to indicate with regard to this question, that I did think it materially interfered with our financial and commercial arrangements, and I did probably intimate what might be the possible consequences of a withdrawal of support. I thought it fair to do so. I knew I should be taunted if I had said nothing about it, and had concealed my real opinion; and therefore I asked for their support, not because this was a question between twenty and twenty-four shillings, but because I thought it would amount to an indication whether the House of Commons disapproved of our proposals with regard to the sugar-duties. I doubted whether it would not be an equivalent to a disapproval of the principles upon which we were about to act, of discrimination between slave-grown sugar and free-labour sugar; and I thought it did amount to an indication of that want of confidence which ought to be followed beyond a doubt by such a result as want of confidence points to. Those were exactly the expressions which I used, and by which I must abide; but I totally disclaim the intention or the fact of having stated that, with respect to every measure introduced by the government, we expected the aid of our general supporters, and insisted upon the complete adoption of all our measures. These conclusions have been come to by persons, for the purpose of dissatisfying my honourable friends behind me; but I do hope my honourable friends—(laughter from the opposition)—yes, I say honourable friends, for I must say that no man,

speaking of general measures, ever received greater proofs of confidence than I have received—I do hope that my honourable friends will not be deceived by the circumstances to which the honourable gentleman has referred, for the promoting dissension, not only upon this, but also among gentlemen on his own side of the House.”

This was the first occasion on which Sir Robert Peel distinctly referred to the growing difficulties of his position. The evils under which the government suffered, the mixed and heterogeneous measures which it proposed, originated from its early conduct as an opposition. If it had not deceived its supporters, it openly permitted them to deceive themselves; it permitted its advocates openly and glaringly to deceive themselves, by tacitly admitting its adherence to doctrines which its subsequent course showed that it never intended to adopt; it was borne into power in 1841 under an intoxicated and frantic brawl for *Protection and Monopoly*, and now it had entered definitively on the course of Free Trade. But if the aspirants to office in 1841 were not sincere in their profession of Protectionist principles, their supporters in parliament, and the agriculturists through the country, who had given them their majority, undoubtedly were so. Hence arose a complication of difficulties, admirably portrayed by Lord Howick in the debate to which we have referred. We shall quote some passages from this able speech, one of the best ever delivered as a commentary on contemporary history. In reference to the singular position of the ministry, his lordship said:—

“Now that they are in office, we find unexpectedly the same gentlemen (I own, not unexpectedly to me), under the pressure of enlightened public opinion out of doors, which they dare not too openly shock—under the pressure also, I have no doubt, of their own conscientious feeling, as to what the interest of the country demands, avowing, as dis-

tinctly as we on this side avow them, the principles of Free-trade. They tell us that it is the interest of the country to sell in the dearest and buy in the cheapest market, and that this is our interest, without reference to what other countries may think it their duty to do. They also found themselves compelled to deal with some of the most monstrous abuses of the old system of protection. By doing so, we know they have alienated from them those gentlemen who differ from them on those subjects ; we know that there is in their minds a feeling of disappointment, which is scarcely concealed. We know that noble dukes and right honourable gentlemen say that they give votes in parliament not because they are satisfied with her Majesty's government, but because they are more dissatisfied with those who they think may succeed them in their offices. Hence it appears that her Majesty's government have not the cordial and sincere support of those gentlemen who are advocates for the system of what is called the protection of domestic industry."

His lordship then pointed out the gross inconsistency between the economic principles maintained by the ministers, and their perverse adherence to Corn Laws founded on directly opposite principles. Hence, as he ably showed, there arose the practical inconvenience of a state of law which every man felt fully convinced could not be continued, and under which he could therefore make no arrangements or calculations for the future. On this point he said :—

"On the other hand, by shrinking from carrying boldly and consistently into effect those principles which they themselves avow, by partially maintaining some of the most mischievous of our restrictions, and more particularly that worst of all, the existing Corn Law, while it violates in every line the principles which they profess to uphold, they do not obtain the cordial support of those who are the advocates

of the system of Free-trade. Hence the difficulty of their position; hence the scenes which we see in this and the other House of Parliament. Is there a manufacturer, a merchant, or a farmer, in the kingdom, who does not feel that those doubts are pregnant with evil to his own individual interest, and to those of the public in general. Sir, this is a state of things to which it is high time there should be put an end; and it can be put an end to only by her Majesty's government, or by those gentlemen who have this night taken an opportunity of manifesting, in no equivocal manner, the feelings they entertain, who manifested them on Friday night by those cheers with which they welcomed a division in which the government were defeated."

Lord Howick continued by pointing out clearly and intelligibly the only way by which the government could relieve itself from its embarrassing if not humiliating position, and assured ministers, that "if they would begin at once and in earnest to make progress in sound legislation," he and his friends would give them earnest and cordial support.

"Government may put an end to it by adopting boldly, consistently, and decidedly, their own principles of commercial policy, by ceasing to halt between two opinions, to urge now an argument in favour of protection, and then to balance it by an argument in favour of Free-trade in the abstract, without ever reducing it to practice. If they declare in favour of Free-trade, with a due respect to existing interests—I do not mean such a respect as adjourns great questions indefinitely, but with a bona fide determination to effect those reforms they think necessary, and to begin at once in earnest to make progress in sound legislation—I am persuaded they will have the cordial and disinterested support in all those questions, of those who sit on this side of the House. If, on the other hand, they declare themselves distinctly and on principle for maintaining things as they are,

I have no doubt they will rally round them again those whose present hostility is now so much complained of."

His lordship then addressed himself to the great landed interest in the following energetic terms :—

" But I beg also to address myself with great respect to that great agricultural party who claim for themselves, and I believe truly, such a preponderance in this country. I say it is also in their power, and will be their duty, to put an end to this state of things. They claim that they have a majority in both Houses of Parliament, and in the country. If they are honestly of that opinion, let them act on it ; let them use that power which they assert they possess, and if her Majesty's government will not adopt and defend their own principles, which they consider essential to the interests of the country, let them insist that those from whom they differ shall give place to men with whom on these essential questions they agree. Will they tell me that, numerous as they are, powerful as they are, they have not enough of force among them to carry on the government ? I cannot believe they will make such a confession ; or that they mean to say that enlightened public opinion is, in fact, so much against the principle of protection, that the experiment is not to be hazarded. If that is their view, I certainly believe it is a just one ; but if it be, I appeal to their deliberate consideration, whether it does not point out what is their duty. If that is the state of public opinion, if the tide sets manifestly in that direction, and it is clear that the system of protection is condemned, and the system of relieving commerce from these vexatious trammels is now that which the majority of educated and enlightened men believe to be the right one, I ask them how they can reconcile it with their duty, or with any just sense even of their own interests, to maintain a contest in favour of a system of restriction, which, on that supposition, can only end in one way."

Lord Howick concluded his admirable address, which was throughout remarkable for its enlarged principles, for the firm but temperate expression of sincere conviction, and for its earnest and generous warmth of feeling, by pointing out the great and peculiar advantages under which a final settlement of these irritating national questions could be undertaken in the existing circumstances of the country by the party which held possession of power.

"But I do feel, what I think most of those who now hear me must also feel, that there is an obvious rottenness in the very foundation of the present state of things, that at the very first difficulties by which it is tried, at the very moment when the country shall be exposed to a serious tempest of any description, that system must of necessity fall. If so, I ask again, will it not be wiser and more prudent to take advantage of the season of comparative calm and repose, to come to that more healthy state of things we all desire? What we want, what the country wants, is a government acting on principle and supported by principle—a government bound together by strong conviction, by agreement in great public principles, and supported by gentlemen who share in those public opinions, and in that general view of what the interests of the country require. This is what I firmly believe to be necessary, and I am persuaded that the continuance of that sort of anarchy, for I can call it nothing but anarchy, which now exists, will be attended with the most pernicious results to the public welfare, and the character of our public men."

The debate on Mr. Villiers' annual motion for the repeal of the Corn Laws speedily followed. It was chiefly remarkable for Lord Howick's open declaration of adhesion to the extreme doctrines of the League, and for the more than ordinary strong language in which the premier declared his unaltered resolution to maintain agricultural protection,

amid the last bursts of that enthusiastic cheering which he was long accustomed to receive from the Protectionists, Sir Robert Peel said :—

“I defend protection on agriculture on the principle, and to the extent, I am bound to say, to which I have defended it before. I am about to pronounce no new opinions on this subject. I have a strong feeling that, speaking generally—and I am not now speaking of the amount of protection—I shall come to that presently—but, speaking generally, I think the agriculture of this country is entitled to protection, and that it is so entitled to protection from considerations of justice as well as from considerations of policy. I do consider that there are special and peculiar burdens on agriculture. I am of that opinion. I do believe that that portion of the act which imposed burdens for the relief of the poor, and subjected the profits of trade to those burdens as well as the profits of agriculture, has not, so far as the profits on trade are concerned, been acted on, whilst it has been acted on with respect to the profits of agriculture. I say, on that ground, that I think there are special burdens applicable to agriculture. I think, also, that there are restrictions on the application of capital as concerns agriculture. I think, therefore, that considerations of justice do entitle agriculture to protection. I think that considerations of policy, so far as the general interest of all classes is concerned, all justify this protection. I do not think so on account of the special condition of the landlord, but because I believe that great public evil would arise, were this motion to be affirmed to-night.”

A new source of embarrassment and unpopularity to the ministers arose from the opening of Mr. Mazzini’s letters in the Post-office, under a warrant from the Secretary-of-State. The burst of indignation with which Sir James Graham’s defence of such conduct was received by the public

compelled the ministers to grant committees of investigation in both Houses of Parliament. The results of the inquiry were trifling, but the injury whieh the moral influence of the government reeeived was serious and deplorable.

Scareely any parliamentary proeceeding of the session produced so much excitement out of doors as a bill for confirming the possession of religious endowments in the hands of Dissenters, and arresting such litigation as had recently taken place in the case of Lady Hewley's charities, which were endowed by her for Calvinistic Independents, but had in the course of generations gradually passed to another religious body, the Unitarians, whose oecupaney was sucessfully contested in the courts of law. These deeisions, though strictly legal, led to some confusion and injustice; as a remedy, Lord Chaneellor Lyndhurst introduced a bill to terminate all further controversy respecting the right to voluntary endowments connected with Dissenting chapels, by vesting the property in the religious body in whose hands it had been for the last twenty years.

Though opposed by the Bishops of London and Exeter, the bill passed the House of Lords with little diffiulety; but before it eame under discussion in the House of Commons, an active opposition was raised to it by the Tractarian Dissenters, and particularly by the Congregationalists, who denounced it as a measure intended to give an undue degree of favour to the Unitarians. The hostility thus exhibited soon assumed the eharaeter of a religious movement; public meetings were held, in which reverend orators ventured to reprobate the bill as inconsistent with the obligations of a Christian government; and not a few menaces were uttered against all politieians who should be so lax as to countenance a measure which prevented orthodox dissenters from turning their Unitarian brethren out of doors. It was highly creditable to the ministerialists, the Whigs, and the

leaders of the League, that they equally spurned this attempt at Sectarian dictation, though many of them were aware that they risked their seats by acting so independently. Sir Robert Peel's speech on the occasion was highly creditable to his firmness and sense of justice. We give only so much of it as is necessary to explain the question in issue. After a brief reference to the preponderance of talent in favour of the measure, he said :—

“ I am bound to say, that my opinion was formed without any very deep consideration of the historical truths, or of the legal doctrines, which have been presented to us in the course of the debate upon this subject. With respect to the legal doctrines, I am not about to undervalue the great legal doctrines which are to be found in the law of England : the great doctrine of trusts, I dare say, ought to be held in much veneration and respect ; but I say this, that if that or any other great legal doctrine imposed the necessity of inflicting wrong, I should look out for a mode of obtaining an alteration of that doctrine, because first I think that individual justice requires it ; and secondly, because in proportion to the importance of the doctrine—in proportion to the advantage of maintaining it—so in proportion is increased the necessity of not subjecting it to the odium of being an instrument of inflicting wrong. I think it would be unjust to permit any rule of law to be so applied, that chapels now held by certain Dissenters from the doctrines of the Church of England, shall be taken from them, and applied, we know not to whom, because after we have taken them away from the present possessors, there will arise this most complicated and most intricate question—upon whom that possession shall be bestowed ? ”

Repeating, that the bill would not touch endowments where the founder had expressly declared that the doctrine of the Trinity should be preached, he proceeded :—

"I can understand why the Unitarian should have said nothing as to his intention—the principle of the law was against it. There was a motive for the concealment of his intentions; it was wise in him to deal in generalities, because the law that then existed told him, that if he contravened the doctrine of the Trinity, his property was forfeited. But why should the Trinitarians, who meant to maintain the Trinity, remain silent as to their intentions? The doctrine of Unitarianism was repugnant to their feelings; the law would respect endowments, and if the intention existed, what motive could they have in their trust-deeds for expressing nothing more specific than that the chapel was founded for the worship of Almighty God, by Protestant Dissenters of the Presbyterian denomination? Is it not more probable that the founders of those chapels were hostile to any subscription whatsoever; that they wished to retain full freedom of opinion; that they objected to conform to any sect, and that they therefore refused to bind their successors by any formula of particular doctrines, respecting in them that freedom of opinion which they claimed for themselves? And can I then, with any justice, presuming that to be their intention—would it, I say, be showing a respect for the trust, a veneration for the intention of the founders, if I were to impute to them opinions and desires which they never entertained?"

Sir Robert stated the case of disputants in Ulster. "In the year 1830, the remonstrants of Ulster having previously professed Unitarian doctrines, separated from the Presbyterian Synod, and the separation was made upon the distinct understanding that the Remonstrant Synod should remain in the possession of all the privileges and immunities enjoyed by them before. Their chapels then were in decay; the members of the congregation, however, since 1830, have repaired the chapels, rebuilt them, taken fresh sites, furnished

additional burying-grounds, and have altogether much improved their condition. Not a word of disturbance was heard till after the decision in Lady Hewley's case, and then the principle which governed that decision induced persons who appeared to have no direct interest in the matter, to bring actions against the Remonstrant Synod of Ulster. To do what? To recover Trinitarian property? No: but to take from Unitarians the chapels they have built or enlarged, and the burial-grounds where their wives and fathers are interred. A deputation from the Remonstrant Synod appealed to government; the ministers attempted to bring about an amicable accommodation, but failing, there was no other course open than legislation, to prevent injustice."

Sir Robert Peel concluded by reminding the House "that charity is greater than faith."

It will easily be seen that the position of mediatorship which Sir Robert Peel seemed anxious to assume, was equally spurned by the Protectionists and the Free-traders. But a collision between the two parties was adjourned in consequence of the premier having given notice of his intention to introduce a bill for the regulation of the Bank of England, and the administration of banking concerns in general. By an act of parliament passed in 1838, conferring certain privileges on the Bank of England, it was provided that the charter granted to that body should expire in 1855, but the power was reserved to the legislature, on giving six months' notice, to revise the charter ten years earlier.

Availing themselves of this option, the government proposed a measure for regulating the entire monetary system of the country. It was a measure which must ever be regarded as the most signal monument of Sir Robert Peel's skill as a financial minister, and it was introduced to the House of Commons in a speech which deserves to be charac-

terized as one of his happiest efforts. The masterly and lucid statement of the principles of currency with which he commenced, imparted an attraction even to that usually barren and repulsive subject; the skill with which controverted points were disposed of as they arose, and the dexterous arrangement and happy elucidation of the details of his scheme, riveted the attention and admiration of the House to a degree, which on a question of so dry and complicated a nature, afforded the highest testimony to the ability of the speaker. On this, his great and final currency measure, the reputation of Sir Robert Peel as a statesman and financier must stand or fall; we shall therefore give as large extracts from his admirable speeches on the subject as the limits of this work will permit.

On the evening of May 6, 1844, the House having resolved itself into committee, Sir R. Peel rose, and addressing Mr. Grcene, who was in the chair, said—

“Sir, there are occasionally questions of such vast and manifest importance, and which prefer such a claim, I should rather say such a demand, on the attention of the House, that all rhetorical prefaces, dilating on their magnitude or enjoining the duty of patient consideration, are superfluous and impertinent. I shall, therefore, proceed at once to call the attention of this committee to a matter which enters into every transaction of which money forms a part. There is no contract, public or private—no engagement, national or individual—which is unaffected by it. The enterprises of commerce, the profits of trade, the arrangements made in all the domestic relations of society, the wages of labour, pecuniary transactions of the highest amount and of the lowest, the payment of the national debt, the provision for the national expenditure, the command which the coin of the smallest denomination has over the necessities of life, are all affected by the decision to which we may come on that great

question which I am about to submit to the consideration of the committee."

Having stated the circumstances under which the question was brought forward, he continued—

"In the present state of this country—in the present state of the currency—after the inquiries which have been instituted, after the degree to which public attention has been called to this subject, her majesty's government feel it to be their duty to avail themselves of the opportunity thus given to them by law, and to consider the revision of the charter of the Bank. They are of opinion, that inquiry has been exhausted—that all the information which is essential to the formation of a satisfactory judgment has been collected, and that it is incumbent on the ministers of the crown to submit to the decision of parliament the measures which in their opinion it may be fitting to adopt.

"Sir, I am perfectly satisfied that the members of this House, rising superior to all party considerations, and to all private interests, will consider it their duty to apply their deliberate and impartial consideration to this great subject. I have that confidence in the House of Commons, from past experience of their superiority to mere party views and personal interests where matters of such paramount importance come under review, that I feel assured such will be the course they will pursue on this occasion. I ask you to-night for no decision. I would even deprecate the expression of opinion. I ask you to listen to the proposals I shall make—to hear the evidence and arguments by which they shall be supported—to read and consider the resolutions which I shall move, *pro forma*; and, after having deliberated maturely on the subject, hereafter to pronounce a cool and impartial judgment upon it."

He then sharply censured the attempt to prejudge the question made by the committee of bankers, and then pro-

eeded thus to expound the great principles of currency, according to economic science.

"My immediate proposition relates to banking concerns, and to the issue of promissory notes; but, considering that ten years have now elapsed since this subject was brought under consideration, I hope I shall be excused if I take a wider range than the immediate questions for decision might seem to justify, and if I advert at the outset to the great principles which govern, or ought to govern, the measure of value, and the medium of exchange. They lie, in truth, at the very foundation of our discussion. We cannot hope to agree on the measure to be adopted with regard to paper currency, unless we are agreed on the principles which determine the value of that of which paper is the representative, and on the nature of the obligation which is imposed upon the issuer of promissory notes. Now I fear there is not a general agreement on those fundamental principles—that there is still a very material difference of opinion as to the real nature and character of the measure of value in this country.

"My first question, therefore, is, What constitutes this measure of value? What is the signification of that word 'a pound,' with which we are all familiar? What is the engagement to pay a 'pound?' Unless we are agreed on the answer to these questions, it is in vain we attempt to legislate on the subject. If a 'pound' is a mere visionary abstraction, a something which does not exist either in law or in practice, in that case one class of measures relating to paper currency may be adopted; but if the word 'pound,' the common denomination of value, signifies something more than a mere fiction—if a 'pound' means a quantity of the precious metals of certain weight and certain fineness,—if that be the definition of a 'pound,' in that case another class of measures relating to paper currency will be requisite.

Now, the whole foundation of the proposal I am about to make, rests upon the assumption that, according to practice—according to law—according to the ancient monetary policy of this country, that which is implied by the word ‘pound,’ is a certain definite quantity of gold, with a mark upon it to determine its weight and fineness, and that the engagement to pay a ‘pound’ means nothing, and can mean nothing else, than the promise to pay to the holder, when he demands it, that definite quantity of gold.”

He then entered into a clever and detailed exposure of the fallacies on the subject of currency, published by writers calling themselves Gemini; and then showed, in opposition to their theories, the necessity of preserving a metallic standard.

“They object to the selection of gold as the standard of value, because gold is an article of commerce,—because there is a demand for it as bullion, affecting, therefore, its value as coin, and disqualifying it to be the measure of value. Now, no one contends that there is, or can be, an absolutely fixed and invariable standard of value. No one denies that the value of gold, with reference to all commodities, excepting gold itself, may be subject to slight variations. But what other substance is not more subject to variations in value than the precious metals? What other substance possessing intrinsic value will not also be in demand as an article of commerce? It is because gold is an article of commerce, because there are no restrictions upon its export or its import, that you can at all times depend upon such a supply of gold for the purposes of coin as may be sufficient for the wants of this country. The precious metals are distributed among the various countries of the world in proportion to their respective necessities, by laws of certain though not very obvious operation, which, without our interference, will allot to our share all that we require. Some entertain

the apprehension that we may be drained of all our gold in consequence of a demand for gold from foreign countries, either for the payment of their armies in time of war, or in consequence of sudden and unforeseen demand for foreign corn for our own internal consumption. It is supposed that gold, being an article in universal demand, and having at all times and in all places an ascertained value, is more subject to exportation than anything else. But the export of gold, whether coin or bullion, is governed by precisely the same laws by which the export of any other article is governed. Gold will not leave this country unless gold be dearer in some other country than it is in this. It will not leave this country, merely because it is gold, nor while there is any article of our produce or manufacture which can be exported in exchange for foreign produce with a more profitable return. If gold coin be in any country the common medium of exchange; or if the promissory notes, which perform in part the functions of gold coin, are at all times and under all circumstances of equal value with gold, and are instantly convertible into gold, there are causes in operation which, without any interference on our part, will confine within known and just limits the extent to which gold can be exported. There may no doubt be temporary pressure from the export of gold, even when it is confined within those limits; but none for which you may not provide, none to which you would not be subject, in a higher degree probably, were any other standard of value adopted in preference to gold.

"I have thus stated the grounds which justify the conclusion, that, according to the ancient monetary policy of the country—according to the law—according to the practice that prevailed at all times, (excepting during the period of inconvertible paper currency,) a certain quantity of the precious metals, definite in point of weight and fineness, has

constituted, and ought to constitute, the measure of value. The minds of men, habituated during the Bank restriction to a departure from that measure of value, were loth to admit those great elementary truths which are at the foundation of the whole system of currency, paper credit, and foreign exchange. Ingenious writers have from time to time laboured to prove the unsoundness of these doctrines, to show that a metallic standard was neither practically nor theoretically the measure of value in this country; and have cited various facts apparently irreconcilable with the theory. But when all the circumstances attending each fact have been fully stated, they have been sufficient to account for the seeming contradiction. When Sir Isaac Newton had established the planetary system on the principle of gravitation and attraction, there were phenomena apparently at variance with the theory. But succeeding philosophers, starting from the point which, in the progress of science, had been reached by Sir Isaac Newton, applying his principles with improved means of investigating truth, solved the doubts which he had not been able to solve, and showed that the apparent contradictions, when all the disturbing influences were taken into account, became, in fact, new demonstrations of the soundness of the original theory. And the same result has followed, and will follow, in the case of objections which have been, and will continue to be, urged against the principle of the metallic standard."

Having quoted the opinions of Sir William Petty, Mr. Locke, and Lord Liverpool, he continued :—

" These are, in fact, the principles which regulate our present coinage. We have a single standard, and that standard, gold—the metal which was practically the standard for many years previously to the suspension of cash payment. The silver coin is a mere token, auxiliary and subordinate to the gold coin; the ounce of silver being now coined into 66s.

instead of 62s., and silver coin not being a legal tender for any greater sum than 40s.

"By the abolition, in this part of the United Kingdom, of the promissory notes below £5, you introduce the gold coin into general use for the purpose of effecting small payments; you enable the holder of the smallest note to demand payment in gold, and thus insure the maintenance of a very considerable quantity of gold as a part of the circulating medium. There is, no doubt, some expence in the maintenance of a metallic circulation, but none, in my opinion, sufficient to countervail the advantage of having gold coin generally distributed throughout the country, accessible to all, and the foundation of paper credit and currency.

"It is contended by some, that if you were to dispense with coin altogether, to adopt the principle of Mr. Ricardo's plan, and make bank-notes not convertible into gold at the will of the holder, excepting when presented to the amount of a very considerable sum (£300 or £400 for instance,) and then convertible into bullion and not coin, you would provide a security against the effects of a panic connected with political causes, causing a sudden demand for gold. I very much doubt the policy of taking such precautions against such a contingency, and consider that the most effectual measure for promoting permanent confidence in the paper circulation of the country, is, to require that the gold coin shall be in general use for small payments, and that the promissory note shall be of equal value with the coin which it professes to represent."

Having thus stated his views on coinage and the metallic standard, he turned to the subject of paper currency, and, following Lord Liverpool's authority, remarked :—

"Paper currency is a very undefined term, as used by speculative writers. To find arguments in its support, at least to the extent to which it is at present carried, they

have been obliged to connect it with paper credit; so that the principles on which the use of paper credit is truly founded, may be brought in support of a great emission of paper currency. Paper currency, strictly speaking, consists only of bills or notes payable or convertible into cash on demand by the person who issued the same at the will of the holder.

“ That appears to me to be the true definition of paper currency, as distinguished from paper credit. It is the substitute for, and immediate representative of coin, and with coin it constitutes ‘money.’ And if you will adhere to the standard of value, and will adopt such measures as shall ensure the uniform equivalency of bank-notes to coin, you may safely, in my opinion, leave untouched other forms of paper credit, and entrust the regulation and control of them to individual caution and discretion.

“ There are some, however, who admit the validity of this distinction, and yet contend that no new legislative interference is required in the case of promissory notes. In their opinion, the true principles which should govern the issue of such notes are, freedom of competition, and immediate convertibility into coin at the will of the holder. The combination of these principles will, in their opinion, afford to the public a complete security against abuse of the privilege of issue.

“ In support of that opinion, they have, undoubtedly, the high authority of Adam Smith and of Ricardo. Both these eminent writers assume that immediate convertibility into coin is all that is requisite to prevent the excessive issue of paper. It is no impeachment of their sagacity, if, in the progress which this science, like all other sciences, is making, there be no reason to doubt the soundness of any particular opinion which they may have delivered. And it is our duty to disregard their authority, and to act on the conclusions of

our own judgment, if either reason or experience convinces us that they are safer guides.

"It appears to me that we have, from reasoning, from experience, from the admissions made by the issuers of paper money, abundant ground for the conclusion, that, under a system of unlimited competition, although it be controlled by convertibility into coin, there is not an adequate security against the excessive issue of promissory notes.

"We should infer, certainly, from reasoning, that free competition in the supply of any given article will probably ensure us the most abundant supply of that article at the cheapest rate. But we do not want an abundant supply of cheap promissory paper. We want only a certain quantity of paper, not, indeed, fixed and definite in nominal amount, but just such a quantity of paper, and that only, as shall be equivalent in point of value to the coin which it represents. If the paper be cheaper than the coin, it is an evil, and not an advantage. That system, therefore, which provides a constant supply of paper equal in value to coin, and so varying in amount as to insure at all times immediate convertibility into coin, together with perfect confidence in the solvency of the issuers of paper, is the system which ought to be preferred. Now, unless the issuers of paper conform to certain principles, unless they vigilantly observe the causes which influence the influx or efflux of coin, and regulate their issues of paper accordingly, there is danger that the value of the paper will not correspond with the value of coin. The difference may not be immediately perceived—nay, the first effect of undue issue, by increasing prices, may be to encourage further issues; and as each issuer, where there is unlimited competition, feels the inutility of individual efforts of contraction, the evil proceeds, until the disparity between gold and paper becomes manifest, confidence in the paper is shaken, and it becomes necessary to restore its value by

sudden and violent reductions in its amount, spreading ruin among the issuers of paper, and deranging the whole monetary transactions of the country.

"If we admit the principle of a metallic standard, and admit that the paper currency ought to be regulated by immediate reference to the foreign exchanges—that there ought to be early contractions of paper on the efflux of gold—we might, I think, infer from reasoning, without the aid of experience, that an unlimited competition in respect to issue will not afford a security for the proper regulation of the paper currency."

He then entered largely into the evidence from the history of banking in England and the United States, to show the monopoly and danger of unlimited competition in the issue of paper. After which he said—

"I have now stated—with respect to the measure of value, with respect to the coinage and currency—and with respect to promissory notes payable on demand—the broad and general principles which I think ought to regulate these three great elements of our monetary system. I have done on this occasion what I have done on others. I have stated without the slightest compromise or concealment, the leading principles to which, in my opinion, our legislation in these matters ought to conform. I have now to state the extent to which I propose to carry out these principles. If I do not carry them out immediately to their full and entire extent, I may be told, as I have been told before, that very good principles have been laid down in the abstract, but that practically I shrink from their application. Nevertheless, the opinion which I have formerly expressed I still entertain—that it is of great importance that public men should acknowledge the great principles by which important measures should be regulated: and, in discussing a question of such magnitude as the present, I had rather it were said, ' You

fall short in the application of sound and admitted principles,' than that 'You have concealed or perverted those principles for the purpose of justifying your limited application of them.' In addressing the House on this important subject, I have, in the first instance, stated principles which I deem to be correct, and which ought to be the rule and guide of our future legislation. I have now to consider, with the same unreservedness, how far the consideration due to special circumstances, to existing interests, to the usages and habits of the community, demands caution and limitation in the immediate application of those principles. All I can promise is, that I will propose no practical measure which is inconsistent with the principles that I have laid down, and which does not tend to their ultimate establishment. It is, however, most important that those who are responsible for the management of the affairs of a great country like this—seeing how easy it is, by unwise legislation, to create panic or introduce confusion into the monetary transactions of the country—it is most important that they should deal considerately with private interests: first, because justice requires it; and secondly, because there is danger that the cause of progressive amendment and reform will be injured, if you cannot reconcile reform with a due regard to the welfare and happiness of individuals.

"In what mode then, admitting the principles I have announced to be correct, in what mode shall we best provide for the present application and ultimate establishment of them, with the least disturbance of existing interests? Some have contended, and I am not prepared to deny the position, that if we had a new state of society to deal with, the wisest plan would be, to claim for the state the exclusive privilege of the issue of promissory notes, as we have claimed for it the exclusive privilege of coinage. They consider that the state is entitled to the whole profits to be derived from that which

is the representation of coin, and that if the state had the exclusive power of issuing paper, there would be established a controlling power which would insure, as far as possible, an equilibrium in the currency. At the same time there have been men, whose judgment is also entitled to weight, who have expressed a different opinion on this subject. This question was under the consideration of the House when Lord Althorp brought forward the Bank Charter bill, in 1833. It had also been the subject of consideration in the select committee of 1832; and Lord Althorp, in moving the extension of the Bank charter, discussed the policy of a single bank of issue to be constituted by and responsible to the government. Having mentioned the name of Lord Althorp, I must, though I differ from that noble lord in respect to politics, bear testimony to his integrity, and to the soundness of his judgment in all financial matters. No man who ever filled the office which the noble lord then held, is entitled to stand higher in public estimation as respects those qualifications for a public trust. On the occasion to which I have just referred, Lord Althorp said:—‘Another point for consideration is, whether the profits, which must necessarily be derived from the circulating medium of the country, should be possessed by government, or should be allowed to remain in private hands? Now, sir, the advantages, the only advantages, which I have been enabled to discover in a government bank, as compared with a private company, are those which result from having responsible persons to manage the concern, the public deriving the benefit of it; but then, on the other hand, I think these advantages are much more than counterbalanced by the political evils which would inevitably result from placing this bank under the control of the government. I think that the effect of the state having the complete control of the circulating medium in its own hands would be most mis-

chievous. Under these circumstances, sir, I certainly am prepared to propose the continuation of a single bank of issue in the metropolis, subject to the control of the publicity of their accounts. If we were now, for the first time, establishing a system of banking on which the country should proceed, I think this would be the most advisable mode of establishing a bank in the metropolis. But, sir, this proposition has the additional advantage—and it is no mean one—that it will occasion the least change; because I certainly am of opinion that, unless some great advantages could be derived from a change in the monetary system of this country, nothing could be more ill-advised—nothing could be more useless, than to depart from it.'—In the latter part of Lord Althorp's observations I entirely agree. The true policy in this country is to work, so far as it be possible, with the instruments you have ready for your hand—to avail yourselves of that advantage which they possess from having been in use, from being familiar, from constituting a part of the habits and usages of society. They will probably work more smoothly than perfectly novel instruments of greater theoretical perfection. If we disturb that which is established, let us have some good practical reason for the change."

Having detailed at great length and with much minuteness the nature of the changes proposed, he concluded by thus recapitulating the outlines of the ministerial plan:

" It is proposed that the Bank of England shall continue in possession of its present privileges—that it shall retain the exclusive right of issue, within a district of which sixty-five miles from London as a centre is the radius. The private banks within that district, which now actually issue notes, will of course be permitted to continue their issues to the amount of the average of the last two years.

" Two departments of the Bank will be constituted: one for the issue of notes, the other for the transaction of the

ordinary business of banking. The bullion now in the possession of the Bank will be transferred to the issue department. The issue of notes will be restricted to an issue of £14,000,000 upon securities—the remainder being issued upon bullion—and governed in amount by the fluctuations in the stock of bullion. If there be, under certain defined circumstances, an increase of the issues of securities, it can only take place with the knowledge and consent of the government; and the profit derivable from such issue will belong to the public.

“ Bankers now actually enjoying the privilege of issue, will be allowed to continue their issues, provided the maximum in the case of each bank does not exceed the average of a certain prescribing period. A weekly publication of issues will be required from every bank of issue. The names of shareholders and partners in all banks will be registered and published.

“ No new bank of issue can be hereafter formed, and no joint-stock company for banking purposes can be established, except after application to the government, and compliance with various regulations which will be hereafter submitted to the consideration of parliament.

“ I have now concluded the duty which I had to perform, and trust I have clearly explained to the House the principle and details of the plan which the government proposes for the future regulation of the currency, and the grounds upon which it is founded. I ask for no vote to-night on the resolutions which I shall propose, *pro formâ*, and, if I might give advice on such a subject, would recommend the postponement of discussion to a future day. To-morrow the correspondence which has taken place with the Bank, explaining more in detail our communications with the Bank, and the nature of the pecuniary arrangements between the Bank and the

government, will be laid upon the table. The knowledge of that correspondence is important as a preliminary to full and satisfactory discussion on the merits of our proposal.

“ Considering the part which I took in the year 1819 in terminating the system of inconvertible paper currency, and in re-establishing the ancient standard of value, it will no doubt be a source of great personal satisfaction to me, if I shall now succeed, after the lapse of a quarter of a century since those measures were adopted, in obtaining the assent of the House to proposals which are, in fact, the complement of them, and which are calculated to guarantee their permanence, and to facilitate their practical operation. But my gratification will be of a higher and purer nature than any connected with the satisfaction of personal feelings, if I may look forward to the mitigation or termination of evils, such as those which have at various times afflicted the country in consequence of rapid fluctuation in the amount and value of the medium of exchange. When I call to mind the danger to which the Bank of England has been exposed, the various effects of a sudden change from an overabundant to a contracted circulation, the reckless speculations of some of the joint-stock banks, the losses entailed on their shareholders, the insolvency of so many private banks, the miserable amount of the dividends which have in many cases been paid, the ruin inflicted on innocent creditors, the shock to public and private credit, then indeed I rejoice on public grounds, in the hope that the wisdom of parliament will at length devise measures which shall inspire just confidence in the medium of exchange, shall put a check on improvident speculations, and shall ensure, so far as legislation can ensure, the just reward of industry, and the legitimate profit of commercial enterprise conducted with integrity and controlled by provident calculation.”

The subject was resumed on the 20th of May, when Sir R. Peel moved the order of the day for the House going into committee on the Bank of England Charter acts.

He said :—“Sir, I should feel very unwilling to interpose any observations of mine before the commencement of the discussion on the resolutions which I am about to move, and would content myself with moving at present that the House do agree to those resolutions, if I did not think it would be for the convenience of many members who are likely to take a part in the discussion, and for the benefit of the discussion itself, that I should make some explanations on particular points, with respect to which I think it probable that questions will be asked. I therefore think it better to anticipate many of those questions, and give to them in a connected form the answers which I must give separately, if they are separately put. It was necessary, as the House will bear in mind, for her Majesty’s government to frame their measure, and for me, as the organ of that government, to make the statement which I submitted on the 6th of May, without the advantage of communicating with parties whose opinions on such a measure as that which we proposed were justly entitled to great weight. Entire secrecy, however, in all matters calculated to affect the currency, was absolutely necessary ; and, however much we might feel disposed to confide in the honour and integrity of many individuals, yet we thought it advisable to forego the advantage of private communications ; and, having formed our opinion on the evidence taken by committees and on public documents within our control, to submit our views to parliament.

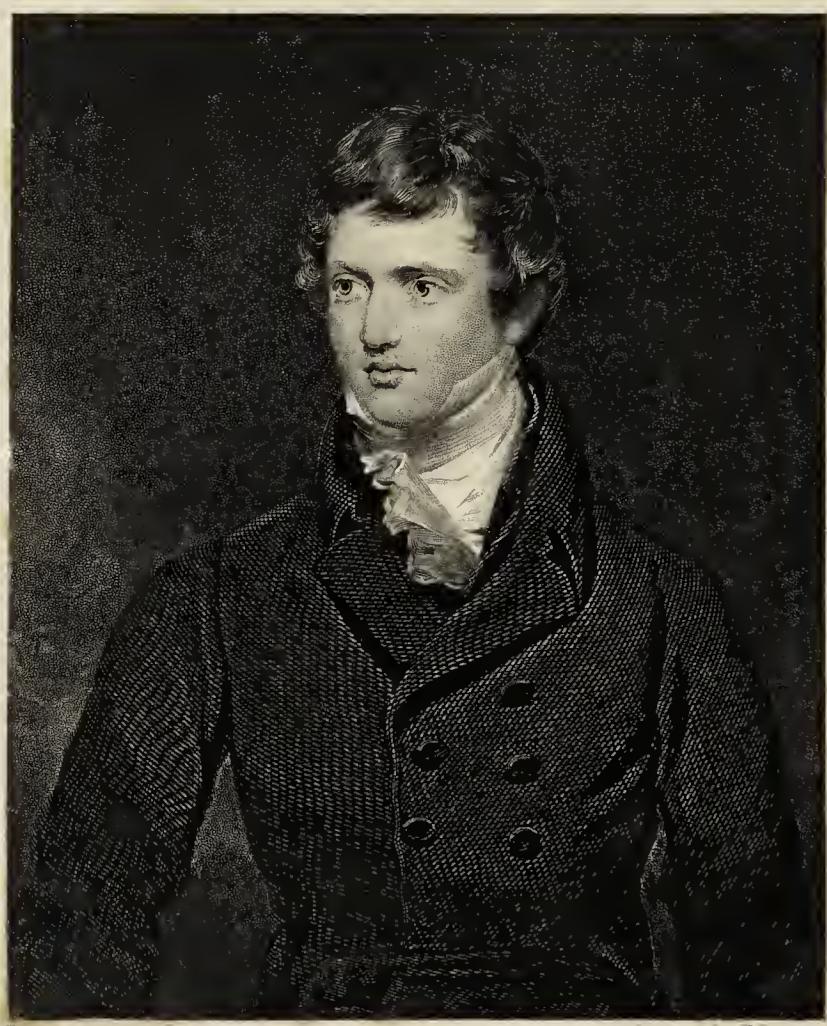
“If, after the public explanation of these views, and after the opportunity afforded to us of hearing the opinions of others, we had seen reason to modify our own, we should have had no hesitation in doing so. But nothing has occurred during the interval which has elapsed, which

induces her Majesty's government to vary, in its leading principles, the plan announced by me on the 6th of May."

He then gave minute explanations on several points to which objections had been raised, and proposed a few modifications which left however the great principle of the measure, as already stated, perfect and untouched.

Sir Robert Peel's measure was warmly supported by the leading Whigs, and was opposed chiefly by Messrs. Muntz and Wallace, General Johnson and Colonel Sibthorp ; but on a division they could only muster eighteen votes against more than two hundred. In the House of Lords it received little discussion, and there was hardly ever so important a measure carried through parliament with so small and ineffectual a show of opposition. At the close of the session Sir Robert Peel referred with much complacency to the amount of important and efficient legislation which under his auspices had been brought to a successful issue. The Poor Law had been amended; a large sum, ultimately to be a million and a quarter, had been saved annually to the country by the reduction of the Three and a half per cents ; the currency had been placed on a safe footing by the Bank Charter bill ; joint-stock banks had been regulated ; the insolvent law had been amended, with a final blow at imprisonment for debt ; an end had been put to vexatious litigation by the Dissenters' Chapels bill ; and several minor financial and municipal reforms had been effected in safety. In concluding the enumeration, he said, "I cannot help drawing a comparison between the condition of the country at this day with the condition of the country in 1841. Taking into consideration the condition of the revenue, of the trade, of the industry of the country, it forms a strong and favourable contrast with what it has been at any former period. It is not my wish to draw any invidious comparisons ; but I





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maintain that with respect to the revenue, trade, and general comfort of the country, there has been a great improvement during the last few years; and without being too sanguine, there exist evidences of advancing prosperity and contentment.

On the 9th of August the House adjourned to the 5th of September, to give time for the House of Lords to decide on O'Connell's appeal. On the 4th of September the judgment of the House of Lords was pronounced—reversing the judgment against O'Connell and his associates. The next day parliament was prorogued.

During the session which had thus closed, Sir Robert Peel found a rapidly increasing difficulty in keeping his party together; he was barely tolerated as a leader, and it was generally believed that a large section of the Conservatives intended to set up Lord Stanley as his rival. Such a purpose, if formed, was effectually checked by the removal of that statesman to the House of Peers; but independent of any suspicion of rivalry, it was desirable for the ministers to remove from the House of Commons a colleague whose imprudence and violence of temper frequently involved them in needless difficulties.

To Sir Robert Peel's caution and prudence must be assigned the merit of the peaceful arrangement of the difference which arose between this country and France on the subject of Tahiti. Taking advantage of some disputes which had arisen between the missionaries, a French admiral took military possession of the island, and ill-treated an English missionary named Pritchard, who was consul in the island. An apology to the English government, and a pecuniary compensation to Pritchard, put an end to a dispute, which, however trifling in its origin, at one time threatened to involve the two countries in open hostilities.

## CHAPTER VIII.

PROGRESS AND PREVALENCE OF THE PRINCIPLES OF FREE-  
TRADE IN THE GREAT STRUGGLE OF 1845.

DURING the autumn and winter of 1844, the efforts of the League on one side, and of the societies formed for the maintenance of agricultural protection on the other, had so engaged public attention, that all other political topics seemed to have fallen into abeyance: organic changes were forgotten; taxation and finance were the only topics discussed in public meetings, and even, it might be said, in private societies. Sir Robert Peel was more than usually reserved; his plans of financial reform were studiously concealed; he appreciated the difficulties of the great problem he had undertaken to solve, and he saw that any premature alarm of the interests with which his financial reforms should necessarily interfere, might raise up a premature alarm and opposition which would multiply impediments to his progress, and perhaps defeat his projects altogether. To preserve a large revenue, and at the same time to relax the inordinate pressure by which industry was weighed down, employment restricted, and the operations of capital and labour ungenerously cramped and limited, was the great problem he had to propose to the legislature, and on its right solution he felt convinced that the prosperity of the country was staked. It was a proposition evident to the comprehension of a child, or even of a Protectionist county-member, that the payment of taxes, which do not go to increase the revenue, must restrict the ability to pay those taxes which contribute to revenue;

and that every shilling abstracted from consumers by monopolies and protections, diminished the ability of those consumers to contribute to the exigencies of the state.

On the other hand, it was equally clear that the abolition of duties on import, whether imposed for protection or not, would greatly diminish the amount of the public revenue, and, therefore, could not be attempted without hazard, unless by a ministry having some surplus of revenue at their disposal. This was, and ought to be, the justification of Sir Robert Peel for the continuance of the Income-Tax, the duration of which, when first proposed, he had limited to three years. Indirect taxation had been carried too far ; it had pressed with crushing severity on the productive industry of the country, and it had been conducted on a most wasteful system, for it took far more from the pockets of consumers than it paid in to the national exchequer. The subject of finance is unattractive ; the study of figures is dry and repulsive ; economic questions involve processes of reasoning and argument which are rarely worked out by men immersed in the ordinary occupations of life. It was the triumph of the League, that it forced the nation into the study of economic science ; that it rendered all its great principles "familiar in our mouths as household words ;" and that it led the nation to abandon all speculative theories of organic change, for the solid and practical advantages of administrative reform.

Signs of progress were to be observed everywhere. On all hands it was agreed that taxation of the raw materials on which industry was to be employed could not be justified, since every limitation of the import of such materials obviously restricted the amount of employment to be derived from the manufacture of these materials. This proposition was too obvious to be denied even by the most sturdy Protectionists : they admitted its truth, but they were perfectly furious when

they discovered the inferences that were deduced from this admission. The *League* contended that "*Food is the first and greatest of raw materials in all manufactures,*" for the simple reason that if men are not fed, they will be unable to manufacture. This argument was conclusive with the operatives in the manufacturing districts ; they had at first held off from the League, deeming it a combination of masters and employers ; but during the years 1843 and 1844, the process of their conversion had made steady progress, and in 1845 it might be said that the operatives of England were Leaguers, to a man.

In opposition to the proposed Free-Trade in corn, it was contended that Ireland would suffer severely when the grain with which it supplied the English markets was exposed to the competition of imports from other countries. O'Connell was almost the only leading Irishman who was not more or less misled by this view of the question ; and, as we have frequently had occasion to use his name with censure, it would be unjust to withhold from him the praise of having on this point risked his local popularity to ensure a great imperial advantage.

The case of Ireland, however, was one which could not fairly be pleaded against Free-Trade ; it might safely be asserted, that no country under the sun exhibited more palpably and more deplorably the necessary results of the monopoly which disguised itself under the name of protection than the Emerald Isle. A population fed on lumpers, housed in hovels, miserably clad, subjected to periodical visits of famine, exposed to the chances of a "clearing system" which turns out its hundreds, and even its thousands, to perish unsheltered, was assuredly no evidence of the perfection of a system. But Ireland in its protective legislation not only had the benefit of duties to prevent import; it had its bounties to stimulate export ; both being designed to subserve the

same purpose—to furnish an excuse for raising the amount of rent by artificially raising the price of corn.

This artificial price of food doubly cursed the Irish farmers and farm-labourers; it placed wholesome food beyond the reach of themselves and their families, while it stimulated a competition for land, so as to raise the price to an amount which left nothing to remunerate the occupying tenant. It happened frequently that people were perishing for want of food in the streets of seaport towns, the harbours of which were crowded with vessels laden with provisions for export. Nay, more: ships came into these ports, laden with meal and flour purchased by English charity, at the very moment when vessels were sailing out laden with similar produce, exported for the benefit of rapacious landlords. Corn Laws enabled the Irish lords of the soil to regard the tenants and labourers as mere machines, necessary to produce articles for an artificial market, and unworthy of the slightest regard the moment that this object was accomplished. Corn Laws were the mainstay and support of absenteeism; they enabled Irish landlords to adopt a system of management by which the returns from the soil should form a rude, but tolerably definite routine, requiring no personal superintendence beyond that of the land-agent and the driver. The Irish labourers had ample experience of the benefits derived from high prices; they could,

“Oh! yes, 'tis a *blessing* that bread is so dear;  
Yes, yes, 'tis a comfort that rent is so high.  
Give the rich man his chariot, the poor man his bier;  
'Tis a favour untaxed, to be suffered to die.”

These high prices exhausted the powers of the Irish people as consumers, and rendered their powers as producers available only for the increase of their toil and the decrease of their remuneration. What was the rate of wages paid to the Irish farm-labourers? We knew districts where four

shillings per week was above the average, and this, too, when the taxed loaf was at its highest price in the market.

“Oh God ! that bread should be so dear !  
And flesh and blood so cheap.”

The Protectionists laboured with more success to get up a sentimental cry against the rigid rules of economic science; this led to a controversy which has since been often revived, and which is of too much interest to be passed lightly over. On the one side, political economy was denounced as adverse to religion and charity ; on the other, it was contended that this science, like every other, tended to promote “glory to God in the highest,” by advancing, “peace upon earth, good-will towards men.” Now that we are approaching that period of our history when Sir Robert Peel became a convert to the Free-Trade principles of political economy, we deem it right to quote the defence of that science which we wrote at the time as a proper introduction to the record of the last great struggle for the maintenance of its principles against the system of prohibitions and protections in England.

“That Political Economy should be complained of as hostile to religion,” says Archibishop Whately, “will probably be regarded a century hence—should the fact then be on record—with the same wonder, almost approaching to incredulity, with which we of the present day hear of men’s having sincerely opposed, on religious grounds, the Copernican system. But till the advocates of Christianity shall have become universally much better acquainted with the true character of their religion, than, universally, they have ever yet been, we must always expect that every branch of study, every scientific theory, that is brought into notice, will be assailed on religious grounds by those who either have not studied the subject, or who are incompetent judges of it . or again, who, in addressing themselves to such per-

sions as are so circumstanced, wish to excite and to take advantage of the passions of the ignorant. In the same manner, in Pagan and Romish countries, any one who is conscious of crime or of debt, flies at once to the *altar*, and shelters himself in the sanctuary."

The Rev. Dr. Chalmers, in an essay which has appeared in the third number of the 'North British Review,' also compares the attacks made on political economy by the author of 'The Perils of the Nation' to the persecution of Galileo for having maintained the true system of astronomy. "There is something strongly analogous," he says, "in the religious horror which our author feels, and which he tries to awaken in the minds of his readers, against the science of political economy. He, making use of an expression in Holy Writ, stigmatizes it as 'science falsely so called,' forgetting that, in these words we have the virtual acknowledgment of a science truly so called; so that while there is undoubtedly a false, there may be also a true political economy, with the doctrines of which he would do well to acquaint himself. Another phrase, taken by him also from the inspired writings, is 'vain philosophy,'—a tolerably clear intimation, and that from the highest of all authorities, that there is a philosophy which is not vain. The works of God, says the Psalmist—and these works must be recognized in the laws and phenomena of human society, as well as in the laws and phenomena of the material creation—the works of God are wonderful, sought out of them that have pleasure therein. They who would divorce theology from science, or science from theology, are in effect, if not intention, the enemies of both."

Scripture itself teaches us that what is called 'a religious ery' has often been raised for the worst of purposes: when it was determined to rob Naboth of his vineyard, the ready accusation was, 'Thou didst blaspheme God and the king;'

and a false charge of blasphemy was the pretext for the murder of the protomartyr Stephen. As, however, there are many good men who insist that every rule of human conduct must be viewed with suspicion which is not directly deduced from Scripture, it is desirable to show that political economy is, in fact, a legitimate application of principles inculcated in the Revealed Word. Archbishop Whately justly observes, “It is a Christian duty to do good to our fellow-creatures; and if so, it must be also a duty to study, to the best of our ability, to understand in what their good consists, and how it is to be promoted. To represent, therefore, any branch of such study as inconsistent with Christianity, is to make Christianity inconsistent with itself.”

Among the many sophisms employed to raise a prejudice against political economy, is the strange assertion that its professors “place science in the place of God.” This is something more than a mere absurdity: it is a palpable contradiction in terms; for science, which means nothing more than knowledge, has itself, like every other good and perfect gift, come down from the Father of Lights. Science is simply the knowledge of the laws which the great Creator of the Universe of Matter and the Universe of Mind has impressed upon both. He is himself the centre and source of all knowledge—the Omniscient; and the refusal of respect to science involves manifest disrespect to Omnicience.

The science of political economy has the great misfortune of being new, and the still greater misfortune of having a name which conveys a very imperfect, or rather a totally erroneous, notion of its nature to the great majority of readers. Literally, “political” signifies that which belongs to a state, and “economy,” the judicious government of a household; those who devised the name, therefore, intended to describe a science which would produce the same advantages to a state that judicious management does to a private

family. Unfortunately, in conventional use, "political" has received the limited sense of governmental, and "economy," in vulgar parlance, is identified with a saving of expenditure. Hence it has been easy to represent the science as nothing more than a system for saving money to the ruling powers, with more or less of a suspicion that this saving is effected at the expense of the governed. We need not say how gross is this misrepresentation both of the nature and objects of political economy: but every one knows how effective this misrepresentation has been, in the appeals made by the ignorant to the prejudices and passions of the more ignorant.

Adam Smith's well-known designation of the science, "The Wealth of Nations," has been similarly misrepresented, and from a similar cause. "Wealth" primarily means, and the philosopher intended it to mean, everything which conduces to the *well-being* of society, a sense in which the word *weal* is still occasionally used; but in ordinary parlance *wealth* has come to signify nothing but money and other material possessions, and Adam Smith is stigmatized as if he had merely set himself to devise a system of money-taking. Yet, even in its limited and vulgar sense, a science of wealth would not deserve condemnation. "The goods of this world," says Archbishop Whately, "are by no means a trifling consideration to Christians, considered *as* Christians. Whether, indeed, we ourselves shall have enjoyed a large or a small share of them will be of no importance to us a hundred years hence; but it will be of the greatest importance whether we shall have employed the faculties and opportunities granted to us, in the increase and diffusion of those benefits among others." A science of wealth would be obviously imperfect, if it did not treat of distribution as well as of accumulation.

When the doctrines of Free Trade are recognized as the plainest lessons taught by political economy, it is confessed that they form part of that system of administering a state

which ensures the greatest amount of comforts to its members, just as judicious management does to the members of a family; and when these same doctrines are declared to be in accordance with the wealth of nations, they are confessed to be essential to the well-being of society. Viewed in his relations to this science, man has been happily defined to be “an animal that makes exchanges.” Some of our superficial sentimentalists have chosen to cavil with this definition; but it rests on the highest of all authorities—on the primal declaration made after the Fall, “In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread:” here the exchange of labour for food is directly enjoined, and the equivalent as directly promised. When political economy aims at discovering the laws which would secure to every man “a fair day’s wages for a fair day’s work,” it acts in accordance with the spirit and letter of this primal injunction, seeking from reason the means of carrying out the behests of revelation. When labour is cheap and food dear, the economist says there is an inequality in the exchange, which he endeavours to rectify; the sentimentalist merely bestows pity upon the labourer, and leaves the evil as he found it. In this instance we need hardly ask whether science or no-science tends most to promote the object of the Divine law.

We have used the phrase, “no-science;” but, in fact, such a thing is impossible: every man forms a kind of science, that is, a collection of real or supposed facts, moulded into formulæ for guiding his conduct, from the time that he has learned not to touch a candle through fear of burning his fingers. The man of true science is the man who extends as widely as possible his observation of facts, and makes his deductions, not from particular and isolated instances, but from a general survey of the entire. The man of false science is he who jumps to a conclusion from a few facts imperfectly observed, and still more imperfectly understood, either from natural

incapacity for observation, or from the obstinate and wilful blindness which is the certain companion of selfishness. Those persons who declaim most loudly against political economy altogether, have a pet political economy of their own: the difference is, that the true science is founded on induction from the collected experience of all ages and nations; but the false science is based merely on the erude guesses of the charlatan, the limited experience of the narrow-minded, or the conscious and unconscious misrepresentations of the interested. When these men denounce science, they tacitly confess that their own pet system is not true science: "they set themselves against reason, because they are conscious that reason is set against them." It is common with such men to say, "Free Trade is good in theory, but it will not do in practice," the blockheads being ignorant, and the knaves designedly concealing, that it could never have been good in theory, if it had not been successful in practice. Theory is nothing more than a survey of ascertained facts, and practice would be nothing more than a repetition of the same facts; so that their objection simply comes to this, that what has been established by fact will be contradicted by fact.

There never was a greater blunder, or grosser misrepresentation, than the assertion that the advocates of any science, and more especially the science of political economy, set up human wisdom in opposition to divine. The man of genuine science recognizes the wisdom of Divine Providence, not less in the laws that regulate man's social existence, than in those which direct the course of the material universe. It is not Free-traders, but Monopolists, who set themselves to rival the legislation of Providence, by interfering, with restraints, and bounties, and artificial regulations, to substitute a system of their own devising for the system of free exchange of products which was granted to man in his primal charter from Heaven. The Free-traders

say, that He who ordained man to be “an animal making exchanges,” and enjoined on him the pursuit of such a destiny, provided a mechanism, free in its course and certain in its operations, which would work out the great object both of reason and revelation—glory to God in the highest, on earth peace, good-will towards men. “And so in the philosophy of Free-trade,” says Dr. Chalmers, “the essence of which consists in leaving this mechanism to its own spontaneous evolutions, do we behold a striking testimony to the superior intelligence of Him who is the author both of human nature and human society—an impressive demonstration of how much the wisdom of man is outpeered by the wisdom of God.”

In the space of twelve months, the armoury of monopoly had been deprived of nearly all the hackneyed sophistries which had been furbished up to disguise cupidity and deceive ignorance. Rigby’s mathematical statement of the falsehood, that cheap bread was equivalent to low wages, had been decisively refuted in every branch of manufacturing industry; and the fact, that at the natural price of food raises the rate of reward for labour, both mediately and directly, had been substantiated beyond the possibility of contradiction. The attempt made by the corn monopolists, in conjunction with a section of the Chartists, to show that the rate of wages depended on the will of the masters, failed most signally. The operatives themselves protested against the deception, and declared, in their memorial to Sir Robert Peel, “that other causes besides the will of the masters regulate the rate of wages.”

When the ministers of religion met in Manchester, and solemnly declared that restrictions on food produced destitution, and that destitution necessarily generated depravity there was a unanimous howl from the monopolist press, an every abusive epithet which the vocabulary of vituperatio:

could furnish, was hurled against these reverend gentlemen. In the statistical report presented to the Anti-Corn-Law Conference of 1842, by Mr. Henry Ashworth, it was shown by the returns of infirmaries, workhouses, and prisons throughout the country, that the then high price of provisions was accompanied by an increasing amount of disease, pauperism, and crime. The monopolist press had the boldness to deny that there was any necessary connection between these concomitant circumstances; but in the *Standard* of January 1st, 1845, we find that in the preceding year of cheaper food and increased employment, the current of crime, which had been previously increasing, was not only effectually checked, but had even been made to retrograde. The bounty of Providence baffled the wicked policy of man to afflict the nation with artificial scarcity: He gave us plenty, and peace and order followed in its train. Who will henceforth deny that the Corn Laws inflicted a moral blight on the community, when their stanchest supporters confessed that their partial defeat by an abundant harvest checked the progress of that guilt which was in a process of continuous increase, so long as the starvation-laws had free scope of action?

The fallacy that the Corn Laws were devised for the protection of the agricultural labourers was unfortunately refuted by the miserable condition to which this meritorious class had been reduced, and was scouted at the spontaneous meetings of the peasantry in Wiltshire. It was incontrovertibly established, that under the operation of the corn monopoly, the physical, and consequently the moral condition of the agricultural labourers had been fearfully deteriorated. The bad prominence of the county of Dorset in this respect, forced public attention to the consideration of the value of that philanthropy which extends its benevolence to distant objects, but shuts up its bowels of compassion against

the needy and the suffering in its immediate neighbourhood.

The farmers' doubts of the advantages of pretended protection fast ripened into a conviction that the system was equally delusive and destructive. They discovered that under its influence they had been degraded into vassals and dependents ; that their votes had been made the subject of base traffic by parliamentary jobbers ; and that their tenures had been kept uncertain, to render their subserviency secure. The protection for which farmers now began to look, was not an artificial price for their produce, but such security of holding as would ensure them a fair return for the outlay of the capital employed in cultivation. Their attention was also directed to a grievance of minor, but still of great, magnitude—the destruction caused by the vast amount of game which titled poulterers raised for the London markets. They were taught, by bitter experience, that the hollow pretext of protection yielded them no profit, while it placed fetters on their limbs, and yokes upon their necks.

But the League had not trusted entirely to the progress of sound principle. Acting on the advice of Mr. Cobden, its numerous members had begun to purchase freehold qualifications in counties ; and so effective was this movement, that whenever a vacancy might occur in South Lancashire, Mr. W. Brown, the member recommended by the League, was sure to be returned, without opposition, though he had been defeated by a large majority only a few months before. The most vigorous preparations were made for extending this movement, and there is little doubt that had the struggle been long protracted, the Free-traders would have secured the great majority of the English counties. There is now abundant evidence that Sir Robert Peel had become convinced of the impossibility of long maintaining the Corn Laws, and that he was prepared to advocate the free import

of food so soon as a contingency should arise which might enable him to show a fair pretext to the landowners for abandoning that protection which they had placed him in office to uphold. It is only justice to add, that several large landowners had become convinced that protection could not be maintained; and though they did not formally join the League, several of them, like the Marquis of Londonderry, openly professed its principles in their addresses to the tenant-farmers.

A little before parliament assembled for the session of 1845, the country was not a little perplexed by the announcement of some ministerial changes. The most important of these was the resignation of the Presidency of the Board of Trade by Mr. Gladstone—certainly one of the most active and intelligent members of the government. His retirement from office was the more surprising, as he was known to possess the entire confidence of the premier; it was even expected, that if any change should be made, he would have been advanced to the higher office of Chancellor of the Exchequer. His retirement, according to a semi-official statement, was caused by his reluctance to concur in the new concessions which the ministers were prepared to make to the Irish people, and which involved a greater sacrifice of the exclusive privileges of the Church of England in Ireland, than were consistent with Mr. Gladstone's well-known opinions on ecclesiastical supremacy.

It was a misfortune for Ireland that the death of his father (the Earl of St. Germans) removed Lord Eliot from the post of Chief-Secretary in that country, at a time when his firm, but conciliatory course, was fast collecting the wealth, the intelligence, and the respectability of the country in firm array round the government, for the maintenance of law and order. Lord Eliot had deeply studied the anomalous condition of Ireland; he saw that there was so much excep-

tional and abnormal in its social condition, that it would be necessary to apply some new and original policy to remedy its disorders; but, before he could mature his plans, he was removed to the House of Lords, and the secretariship for Ireland was given to Sir Thomas Fremantle — a man of precedent, red-tape, and routine, who acted as if he wished to avoid any heavier responsibilities than would devolve on a clerk of the Home-Office in England. Lord Heytesbury, then Lord Lieutenant, was a veteran diplomatist, who was equally anxious to avoid any serious responsibility; and thus at a critical moment the administration of Ireland virtually devolved on the underlings of the Castle, and on the functionaries of the Home-Office in England. A vice-royalship thus conducted was little better than a mischievous mockery, and few would have lamented its total abolition.

Since his liberation from prison, O'Connell had assumed a more moderate tone than comported with the feelings of his more fiery partisans: a party known by the name of "Young Ireland" had been formed against him in the Repeal Association, and its nominal leader was Mr. W. S. O'Brien, whose recent adhesion to the repeal cause has been mentioned in a preceding chapter. Mr. W. S. O'Brien had few qualifications for popular leadership, besides questionable descent from the ancient kings of Munster, and unbounded confidence in himself. During the period of O'Connell's confinement, he had taken on himself the leadership of the Repeal Association, and had secretly laboured to form a party of his own. The young men gathered round him; they had become weary of O'Connell's excessive caution, which they regarded as cowardice, and they suspected that he would not be unwilling to barter the cause of repeal for some feasible advantages to his country, if attended by official advancement for the members of his family. Every one saw that O'Connell and O'Brien could not long go on together, like the two

kings of Brentford smelling at one nosegay ; the open rupture was adjourned because O'Connell's declining health showed that his leadership must soon reach its natural termination, and every one saw that there would then be a sharp struggle for the succession between Mr. Smith O'Brien and Mr. John O'Connell.

Thus the two great questions of Free-Trade and the condition of Ireland, were both in a most unsatisfactory position, but at the same time both offered elements on which an arrangement of their difficulties could be based, if the premier possessed sufficient strength to mould his party to his purposes. On the very first night of the session, Lord John Russell delivered a very able speech, in which he reviewed the whole course of the ministerial policy, and gave in what may be called his virtual adhesion to the course of Free-Trade. In reply to Mr. Thomas Baring, the seconder of the address, he said,—

“ There remains one topic, to which it is gratifying to me to allude. I mean the prosperous state of the manufacturing and commercial interests. The honourable gentleman who seconded the address to-night—and no one is more conversant with the subject—in treating this part of the question, gave us several instances of this prosperity, and he told us that even the iron trade, which last year did not partake of the prosperity which was enjoyed by other branches of commerce, is this year in a comparatively flourishing condition. But while that is perfectly true, and while we have every reason to be thankful to Divine Providence for the bounteous harvest with which the land has been blessed, there is yet another reflection occurs to me, and which I do not mention to damp our feelings of exultation, or to diminish the force of those facts which the honourable member has recounted, but only for our warning as legislators. In 1836, on the 4th of February, the very day of that year on which

we are now met in this, an honourable friend of mine, the member for Sheffield, seconded the address. In so doing he went through the various interests of the country—cotton, wool, silk, iron—and he found that the increase had been very large, that our exports had greatly increased on a comparison with the five years antecedent. The honourable member drew a picture of the flourishing condition of the country in 1835. Then we had had a favourable harvest. But 1838, 1839, and 1840 unhappily brought us into a very different condition; when we had bad harvests; when it did not please Providence to continue to us the same state of blessing we had heretofore enjoyed; then we suffered most severely from the depression of our manufactures and commerce in that season of high prices. No man can expect the course of things to continue unaltered, or that we shall have in this country every year a recurrence of those bounteous harvests with which we have of late been blessed. If, then, we cannot expect that—the reflection occurs, Can men do anything to remedy the evils which deficient harvests bring along with them? I think we can; not, indeed, by attempting to interfere with the course of Providence, but by looking at another dispensation of Providence, which enables man to exchange the products of his own country with other and distant regions. Let us, then, as I hope we shall, consider in the course of the present year, whether we have not the power to ward off the storm which at some future period of deficient harvests may fall upon us, by giving to those productions of other nations which we can best use and employ, a more favourable inlet into this country than they have at present. By so doing, you would be only acting in consonance with the principles of the present government, and of the great majority of this House. They do not hold, with that great society which met yesterday—that protection to British industry is the true way to ensure a permanent

flourishing condition for the people of this country. On the contrary, with respect to many articles of great value, they have declared that principles opposed to those of protection, and which, if not entirely Free-Trade, are known by the name of Free-Trade principles, are those by which the intercourse of nations should be regulated. If they continue in these opinions—if they differ from those great authorities which maintain that protection is for the benefit of the people—let us have the advantage of the practical working out of those opinions. *I know that those who propose this are called the enemies of agriculture; but I am convinced that protection is not the support, but the bane of agriculture . . .* The question is, whether you shall do, in a season of prosperity, calmly, deliberatively, with all the dignity of legislators considering what is best for those we represent, that which you may have to do hereafter hastily, under the compulsion of popular uproar, and with the fear that you may be unable to deny that which you appear to grant. I must say, I think that, both with regard to the question of Ireland and with regard to this question of Free-Trade, you ought to take advantage of the present time. You say Ireland is more tranquil; you say that trade is prosperous. Shall we lose the opportunity when everybody—I think almost everybody—will admit that, if you were forced by foreign war and internal commotion, you would give to Ireland almost every thing she asks, and when every body will admit that, if forced by two or three bad harvests, or strong popular excitement, you would have no hesitation in changing your Corn Laws. If that is the case, do not wait for those events. Take your time now; take advantage of the great prosperity that is before you. Consider yourselves as most happy in being in the situation of government at such a period, and show yourselves worthy of the great nation which you are called upon to defend."

The remarkable declaration, given with a tone of emphasis, in the preceding page, produced a marked effect on the House. It was at once caught up by Mr. Miles, then one of the most prominent leaders of the Protectionists, as a declaration of alliance with the League; and Mr. Miles was left to enjoy his opinion undisturbed by any disclaimer or explanation from Lord John Russell. The same words were accepted by Mr. Villiers as denoting the relinquishment of the ground that had previously divided his lordship from the Free-traders; and Mr. Villiers' interpretation was allowed to pass without correction.

The attention of the House was, however, soon directed from this important subject to the more immediately interesting explanation which Mr. Gladstone gave of the causes that led to his resignation. After thanking Lord John Russell for the very kind manner in which he had spoken of his services, he observed, that in the statement which he was about to make, he had no blame to cast on any of his colleagues for any dereliction of their principles or professions. His statement, therefore, would not be a controversial statement or a justification of his conduct, but a mere explanation of circumstances, which, if misstated or misconceived, might lead to mischievous mistakes. After this preface, he thus proceeded:—

“I have not resigned on account of the intention of the government, so far as I have a knowledge of it, to introduce any measure relating to the Church of England or of Ireland. The cause, then, I am about to lay before the House, is the sole cause which has led to the step I have adopted. I had taken upon myself, some years ago, whether wisely or unwisely is not now the question, to state to the world, and that in a form the most detailed and deliberate, not under the influence of momentary consideration, nor impelled by the heat and pressure of debate, the views which I entertained

on the subject of the relation of a Christian state in its alliance with a Christian church. Of all subjects, therefore, which could be raised, this I had treated in a manner the most detailed and deliberate. I have never, however, been guilty of the folly which has been charged upon me by some, of holding that there were any theories which were to be regarded alike, under all circumstances, as immutable and unalterable. But, on the other hand, I have a strong conviction, speaking under ordinary circumstances, and as a general rule, that those who have borne solemn testimony on great constitutional questions, ought not to be parties to proposing a material departure from them. It may be in the recollection of the House, that my right honourable friend at the head of the government did, towards the close of last session, allude to inquiries he was about to make into the possibility of extending academical education in Ireland, and indicate the spirit in which that important matter might be dealt with. I am not in possession of the mature intentions of the government, and can only refer to them so far as they are known to me. I am bound to say, in regard to what the government contemplate in regard to the Roman Catholic College of Maynooth—a subject to which my right honourable friend made distinct allusion—that I know nothing beyond what might fairly be inferred from what my right honourable friend then said. But those intentions were at variance with what I have stated as the best and most salutary principles, and in my view a departure from them. I do not mean a first departure from them; but I think the public would feel, and justly feel, that the spirit of that measure did involve a material alteration of the system which, upon its own merits, I have felt it my duty to advocate. I therefore held it to be my duty, whenever such a measure came before the House, to apply my mind to its consideration, free from all biased or selfish considerations,

and with the sole and single view of arriving at such a conclusion, as upon the whole the interests of the country, and the circumstances of the case, might seem to demand. Again I tell the House, I am sensible how fallible my judgment is, and how easily I might have erred ; but still it has been my conviction, that although I was not to fetter my judgment as a member of parliament by a reference to abstract theories, yet, on the other hand, it was absolutely due to the public, and due to myself, that I should, as far as in me lay, place myself in a position to form an opinion upon a matter of so great importance, that should not only be actually free from all bias or leaning with respect to any considerations whatsoever, but an opinion that should be unsuspected. On that account I have taken a course most painful to myself in respect to personal feelings, and have separated myself from men with whom, and under whom, I have long acted in public life, and of whom I am bound to say, although I have now no longer the honour of serving my most gracious Sovereign, that I continue to regard them with unalterable sentiments both of public regard and of private attachment.

" I do feel it to be my duty also, at the same moment, distinctly to say, that I am not prepared to take part in any religious warfare against the measures of my right honourable friend. I can understand, and I have even ventured to vindicate, the principles upon which a Christian state allies itself, for religious purposes, with a Christian church ; but if the time has come, when, owing to religious divisions, and a great modification of political sentiments, what remains of that system must be further departed from, then I cannot understand how a line of distinction is to be drawn unfavourable to my Roman Catholic fellow-subjects in Ireland. But I most fervently and earnestly trust and hope that they will be regarded as having a title to the favour of the legislature,

on the same grounds as members of other professions of Christians. I have said nothing of the expediency of the measure which my right honourable friend proposes to introduce, because I feel that it ought not to be prejudged, but to receive a calm and deliberate consideration when it comes properly before the House. But I wish most distinctly to state, that I am not prepared to take part in any religious warfare against that measure, such as I believe it may be, or to draw a distinction on the other hand between the Roman Catholic and other denominations, with reference to their religious opinions. I do not know that I have anything to add."

Sir Robert Peel confirmed Mr. Gladstone's statement in every particular. He avowed the highest respect and admiration for Mr. Gladstone's character and abilities, admiration which, with obvious feeling, he declared to be only equalled by his regard for his private character. But he said that he felt himself bound to add some details on which his right honourable friend had felt himself precluded from entering, and said,

"If my right honourable friend did not immediately press his resignation, for *that* I am responsible; I was unwilling to lose, until the latest moment, the advantages I derived from one I consider capable of the highest and most eminent services. I think it right to state, or rather to re-state, that it is not with regard to any question of commercial policy that my right honourable friend has sent in his resignation. For three years I have been closely connected with my right honourable friend in the introduction of measures connected with the financial policy of the country; and I feel it my duty openly to avow, that it seems almost impossible that two public men, acting together so long, should have had so little divergence in their opinions upon such questions. The House may remember, that in the course of last session,

upon a motion by an honourable gentleman opposite, the member for Waterford, I made a declaration to this effect—that her Majesty's government would, during the recess, apply themselves to the great question of academical education in Ireland; that I did admit, looking at the population, looking to the state of the country with respect to universities, looking at the state of Scotland with respect to the opportunities there afforded for academical education; seeing that in England there were the two great universities of Oxford and Cambridge, that more recently there had been established in the metropolis two colleges, since united; that in Scotland there were no fewer than five universities; and then looking to the state of Ireland, and finding that, with the exception of the establishment at Belfast, there was only one university, I was disposed to admit that in that country there did not exist the same facilities for academical education as in England and Scotland. I trust it is unnecessary to say, that I did not make that statement for the purpose of evading any temporary difficulty. I made it deliberately, and with a firm conviction of its truth on the part of myself and my colleagues, and that it was a pledge which should be fulfilled, and with the determination that I would not, by general phrases, encourage expectations which could not be realized. We shall therefore be prepared to fulfil that pledge.

“We have considered the question of academical education in Ireland; and at an early period of the present session we shall propose an increase of facilities for academical education, open to all classes of her Majesty's subjects in this country. I did not at the close of the last session shrink from the declaration, that, among other institutions connected with academical education, the state of the College of Maynooth should undergo the consideration of the government. Sir, we do intend to make a proposal to this House,

and I frankly state, on the very first day of the session, that it is our intention to propose a liberal increase of the vote for the College of Maynooth. I beg to state also, with equal distinctness, that we do not propose to accompany that increased vote by any regulation with respect to the doctrine, discipline, or management of the college, which can diminish the grace and favour of the grant."

The premier carefully abstained from any definite statement of his intentions with regard to Free-Trade, but in an incidental debate on the following night, he took an opportunity of making this significant declaration, "THE RESTORATION OF PROTECTION IS IMPOSSIBLE; and even if it were possible, I would not apply it as a remedy for distress arising from other causes, the existence of which I deeply deplore."

On the 14th of February, Sir Robert Peel made his financial statement, not, as etiquette required, delegating that task to the Chancellor of the Exchequer. It was on the whole a most gratifying statement: he announced the remission of taxes to the amount of three millions three hundred thousand pounds, including such important items as the export duty, the excise on glass, the import duty on cotton-wool, and on more than four hundred articles of various kinds used in manufacture. Unfortunately he said not a word about corn; and with respect to sugar, he still adhered to the foolish and pernicious system of discriminative duties, in order to maintain a fiscal distinction between slave-grown and free-grown produce. These defects naturally provoked some ridicule when the schedule of articles liberated by the tariff was presented to the public. We venture to insert one of the most humorous and characteristic of these comments. It formed the postscript to the *League* of February 22nd, 1845:

"We have just received the list of the 430 articles on

which the import duties are to be ‘totally and immediately’ repealed. The catalogue is more calculated to excite surprise at the folly which taxed these articles, than admiration of the wisdom that discovered the expediency of their removal from the tariff. Some of the items suggest a few serious reflections not wholly devoid of amusement. Thus, while our bread is taxed, *arsenic* is admitted duty free; so that, if we cannot have food at the natural price, we may have poison on moderate terms. *Beef-wood* meets our eye in the catalogue, where we should much rather see the beef without the wood. *Singing-birds* are no longer entitled to protection, which must greatly annoy Lord Winchilsea and the rest of the Finches. *Bones of cattle* are liberated from duty, but the flesh upon them remains subject to the landlords’ tax; foreign animals are allowed to furnish us with everything but meat: free admission is granted to their bones, their hides, their hair, their hoofs, their horns, and their tails—to every thing but their flesh, which is precisely the part of which we stand most in need. *Brimstone in rolls* we may have if we please, but for bread in rolls we supplicate in vain; *brimstone in flour* we are to get at will, but no other flour will be allowed by the monopolists. We wish that we could reverse the arrangement, and leave them the brimstone, while the rolls and flour should go to the nation. *Bristles* may come in, but not the pork they covered: and should children ery for food, the State Doctor has provided the same remedy as Molière’s Mock Doctor, in ‘Le Médecin malgré lui,’ viz., ‘a good whipping,’ by allowing the admission of *canes* duty free. *Unmanufactured chalk* is liberated from taxation, but in its manufactured condition, as milk, its exelusion is continuud for the sake of the agricultural interest. *Coals* may be carried to Newcastle without let or hinderance; and the same generosity is exhibited in the free admission of cotton-yarn to Manchester. *Feathers, flocks, and flower-roots for beds.*

have won the favour of the premier; but flocks of sheep continue under the appropriate protection of the Duke of Richmond. All *gums*, except those in the head, are honoured with special recognition by the minister; instead of a supply for them, he offers us *jewels*, duty free, which exemplifies ‘asking for bread and receiving a stone’ with a vengeance. As we cannot obtain food to fatten ourselves or our cattle, we are graciously permitted to import *animal oil*; and *Orange Peel* having disappeared since 1829, a fresh supply may be had from abroad, with the addition of *Lemon Peel*, the acid being derived from the income-tax. We find a long catalogue of liberated seeds; but lament that the seeds of wheat, oats, and barley are not among the enfranchised, though botanists might rank them among the *un-enumerated grasses*. *Thrown silk* is the only article in which the principle of protection is directly abandoned, unless we include *teasles* as part of agricultural produce. There is much cry but very little *wool* in the budget, beyond cotton-wool, which is really important; there are, however, several long *yarns* in addition to that spun by the premier in his opening speech.”

But in spite of this ridicule, it must be confessed that the premier had ventured on a bold reduction of duties as unexpected as it was gratifying. The abolition of the import duty on cotton-wool may reasonably have been anticipated; but the abolition of *all* duties on exports, and the abandonment of the import duties on raw material, constituted a most important advance on the road to Free-Trade. The entire abolition also of the excise duty on glass was a most striking evidence of the progress which had been made in sound economical opinions. The countenances of the agricultural members, as they listened to this able financial statement, testified how keenly they felt this new demonstration of the power of those principles, to the advocacy of which the League had consecrated its labours.

The portion of the ministerial tariff most fiercely resisted, was that which placed discriminating duties on sugar. Mr. Macaulay opposed the distinction in one of the most eloquent and telling speeches ever delivered in the House of Commons ; as we happen to possess a copy corrected by himself, we shall make some quotations from so admirable a piece of eloquence, which has hitherto been published most incorrectly. Referring to the inconsistency of admitting some articles of slave-grown produce, and rejecting others, he said :—

“ I deny that we lie under any obligation to turn our fiscal code into a penal code, in order to correct the vices which exist in the institutions of independent states. If once you admit that principle, it leads to consequences from which every one of us would revolt, and which would throw the whole commercial system of the world into utter confusion. If that principle be adopted, it follows that our whole fiscal legislation is one mass of inhumanity and injustice, and that the budget of the right honourable baronet in particular is one mass of inhumanity and injustice. I am far from denying the paramount authority of moral obligation ; I am far from desiring to render fiscal or commercial considerations superior to moral obligation ; for I know it is not only wicked, but in the highest degree short-sighted, to suppose that we can promote the permanent interests of a great nation like this, by any systematic violation of the principles of justice and morality. I would adhere to those principles, but I would adhere to them consistently. I would not set up a moral law to serve one turn to-day, and then quibble it away to serve another purpose to-morrow. I would not keep two standards of right and wrong : one to be employed when I wish to serve a favourite interest, and the other when I desire to promote the commercial advantage of the country. I would not have two weights or two measures ; I would not

blow hot and cold ; I would not strain at a gnat and swallow a camel. But I contend that this is what the government has done. If honourable gentlemen opposite wish to follow out their principles, they have opportunities enough : for the whole statute-book swarms with enactments opposed to those principles. I will take one single instance from the existing statute-book, which seems to be a decisive test—I will not say, of the personal sincerity of honourable gentlemen opposite, against whom I do not wish to make the slightest imputation, but of their powers of discrimination. Why, look at the single article of tobacco. Not only do you take the tobacco of the United States, which is slave produce,—not only do you take the tobacco of Cuba, which is grown by slaves, and, as you tell us, by slaves recently imported in defiance not only of the general principles of justice and humanity, but of the provisions of solemn treaties,—but you positively interdict the free labourer of the United Kingdom from growing tobacco. During two centuries you have had on your statute-book a law prohibiting the growth of tobacco in England, and directing that all tobacco plantations in England shall be destroyed. But the free peasantry of Ireland took to cultivating tobacco ; its cultivation spread ; it was becoming an important article of produce, and it seemed likely to be a prominent article in the trade of that country. Then down came the legislature, and you made a law interdicting the Irish freemen from growing tobacco. Observe—you take the tobacco grown by slaves ; you give the producers of that tobacco a monopoly ; and if the freeman of the United Kingdom attempts to grow it, you exchequer him—you grub up his plantation. That I conceive to be a very fair test to offer to right honourable gentlemen opposite, by which they may prove to what degree they mean to be consistent in the policy they adopt. I will ask—are you prepared to take this monopoly from the tobacco-producers

of the United States and of Cuba? I am confident that the right honourable baronet, the right honourable Chancellor of the Exchequer, and the right honourable gentleman the late President of the Board of Trade, will instantly answer, 'No; certainly not.' And why not? 'Because it would injure the revenue,' is their answer. 'We know,' they will say, 'that all the tobacco imported from abroad is grown by slaves; that a great deal of it is grown by newly-imported slaves; but we know also that at the Custom-House we are able to obtain a duty of 600 per cent. upon that tobacco,—indeed, sometimes 1,200 per cent. 'And,' those right honourable gentlemen will add, 'if we suffered the freemen of this country, who do not work under the lash, to grow tobacco in England and Ireland, it would be difficult to get an excess duty of even 100 per cent. We cannot submit to this loss of revenue, and therefore we give this monopoly of tobacco to the slave-holder, and make the growth of tobacco by freemen a penal offence.' If, then, this moral obligation of which we hear so much, may, with perfect propriety, yield to fiscal considerations, on what principle are we to be debarred from the import of Brazilian sugar? If this moral obligation be one which must not yield to fiscal considerations, let us, at all events, have British snuff and cigars. It may be said in favour of the existing government—and I fully admit the fact—that they did not enact the law to which I have just called the attention of the House. They found that law in existence; and I fully admit there is a great deal of soundness in the Conservative principle on which they have maintained it—that there are many things we ought not to have set up, which, nevertheless, when we find them set up, we ought not readily and violently to pull down. But the right honourable baronet opposite is not content with maintaining laws which he finds existing in favour of slave-grown produce. He introduces new laws to the same effect. He comes

down to this House and proposes to take off completely the duty upon cotton, and he says he does so in accordance with a great principle. He tells us that this will effect a great amelioration of our financial system, and that it will confer an important benefit on the people of this country. In that opinion I quite agree with the right honourable baronet, and I intend to give my support to that part of his measure. But by whom is this cotton grown? Is it not grown by slaves? I have seen in the writings of those who have eulogized the right honourable baronet's scheme, a paragraph to this effect:—‘Thus has this eminent statesman given to the English labourer a large supply of this important raw material, and disappointed those ravenous Whigs who wished to inundate England with sugar dyed in negro blood.’”

It was one of the anomalies of the ministerial measure, that the slave-grown sugar of the United States was admitted on more favourable terms than the sugar of Brazil. Mr. Macaulay took advantage of this obvious inconsistency to draw the following most repulsive but most powerful picture of the system of slavery existing in the United States of North America:

“I utterly deny the proposition that the products we are to take from the southern states of America are not the fruits of the slave-trade. I say they are; and I say that, if there be, on the face of this earth, a society which, before God and man, is more accountable than another for the misery of the African race, it is that very republic of the United States, to whose produce the right honourable baronet proposes to give free admission into this country. I can assure the House that I feel no pleasure in going into arguments of this nature. I conceive that it is not the duty of members of parliament here to discuss abuses which exist in the institutions of other nations. By dis-

cussions of that nature, indeed, we can scarcely expect to produce any salutary effect with regard to the reform of such abuses. They are rather calculated to wound national pride, and to inflame national animosity. But the right honourable baronet opposite turns this House into a judicature where we are to arraign and criticize the conduct of all nations under heaven, before we determine what our scale of duties shall be, and with what countries we shall or shall not trade. The right honourable gentleman forces upon our consideration questions with which, as a member of parliament, I have nothing to do, and which I am anxious to avoid. But how can I do so? The shopkeepers and professional men whom I represent, say, ‘Why are we to go on paying, probably for several years, an impost, admitted by those who imposed it, to be grievous, unequal, and inquisitorial?’ The paper manufacturer and the soap manufacturer asked why, if the income-tax is to be continued, they are not to have some share of relief? The answer is, ‘Because Brazil does not behave so well as the United States with respect to the negro race.’ Then, can I avoid instituting a comparison? Am I not absolutely forced to test the truth of this statement? I say, then, that there exists in the United States a slave trade in no respect less odious or demoralizing—and, in my opinion, more odious and more demoralizing—than that which is carried on between the coast of Africa and Brazil. North Carolina and Virginia are to Louisiana and Alabama, what Congo is to Rio Janeiro. The slave-states of the Union are to be divided into two classes—the breeding states, and the consuming states. In some of the United States slaves are bred—the human beast of burden is reared up till he is enabled to endure deadly labour in the sugar and cotton estates, with which you are extending our relations, and to which he is sent to be killed. The extent of the traffic we may learn from the census of

the United States of 1830 and that of 1840. North Carolina and Virginia are two of the chief breeding states. During the ten years from 1830 to 1840, the number of slaves in North Carolina has been, as nearly as possible, stationary. In Virginia, during the same period, the number positively decreased, although, both in North Carolina and Virginia, propagation was going on to an enormous extent. In both those states, during the time I have mentioned, hundreds of thousands of negro slaves were born ; but the births exceeded, by hundreds of thousands, the number of deaths. What, then, became of these people ? Look at the census of those states where we know the negro race is worn down by a cruel labour, and where, from its own resources, it could scarcely keep up its numbers—nay, where those numbers would rather diminish. Take the case of Louisiana. In 1830, there were in that state 107,000 slaves ; in 1840, 170,000. The slave population of Alabama in 1830, was 117,000 ; in 1840, 253,000. In Mississippi, during the same period, slave population increased threefold. In 1830, the numbers were 15,000 ; in 1840, 195,000. That is the scale of this slave trade. As to its nature, ask any Englishman who ever travelled through the southern states of America. Jobbers go about from state to state, taking advantage of the difficulties of the planters in the breeding states ; they rend asunder the dearest ties of nature and of marriage, as unscrupulously as any Guinea captain ; they buy slaves, until they have made up their ‘gang’ to three hundred or four hundred ; and then these human beings, handcuffed, fettered, guarded by armed men, are driven as you would drive, (or rather as you would *not* drive,) a herd of oxen to Smithfield, to the southern states, to undergo the deadly labour of the sugar-mill. In Louisiana, the labour of the sugar-mill sends, in a short time, the stoutest African to his grave ; but still in Virginia negroes are growing up to supply

the horrid trade. God forbid that I should extenuate the slave-trade in any form; but I must say, that I conceive it may be viewed in its most horrible and odious aspect in the United States. It is bad enough that uncivilized men should go to the coast of an uncivilized country, and that they should there seize upon wretched barbarians, and carry them in slavery to a foreign land; but that civilized men—Christians, freemen—should breed the slave, and, if I must speak out the whole horrible truth, even begot the slaves they breed,—that a man, proud of his liberty, calling himself a Christian, a baptized man, frequenting a Christian church, should see his own offspring gamboling about him in their childhood, that he should watch them growing up to age, and that he should then sell them for five hundred dollars, and consign them to a life which is a lingering death,—this is more painful, infinitely more painful to contemplate than the slave-trade of Africa. I am now talking of a slave-trade which extends to tens of thousands of human beings every year—a slave-trade as regular as the trade in pigs between Dublin and Liverpool, or in coals between the Tyne and the Thames. I have no wish to extenuate the evils of slavery in the Brazils; but I do say that, on the whole, it is less hopeless, and its evils are not so dreadful, as those of slavery in the southern states of America . . . They put themselves at the head of the slave interest, just as Queen Elizabeth put herself at the head of the Protestant interest of Europe; and wherever their favourite institution is in danger, are ready to stand by it, as Queen Elizabeth stood by the Dutch. I say, therefore, that I think I have made out this, viz., that of all the states now existing, the republic of the United States is that which has long been acting, and is now acting, in a manner the most culpable as regards slavery and the slave trade. I say that they have been restlessly active in preventing every efficient measure of ours for suppressing

the slave-trade; and I say, that the slave-trade between Brazil and the coast of Africa, is to be attributed, in a great measure, to the United States. Then I come to this: the right honourable baronet says he cannot admit Brazilian sugar, because the Brazilians use the negroes so ill; but he will admit the slave-grown cotton of the United States. Is it possible for him to prove that my noble friend's proposition would give a stimulus to the slave-trade in Brazil? I use his own argument to prove that his proposition would give a stimulus to the slave-trade of the United States. I have not the least doubt, but that as soon as the contents of his budget shall be known across the Atlantic, the slave-trade traffic will become more horrible than ever—that the jobbers in human flesh and blood will be more busy than ever—that the gangs of manacled negroes moving southward to their doom will be more numerous on every road. But the right honourable baronet says, that this is a great boon that he is giving to the country. But I do not intend to oppose his proposition—I intend to support it, and I can perfectly reconcile it to my conscience. How the right honourable baronet can reconcile it to his, is what I am quite at a loss to conceive, and what I am very curious to hear:"

But the most curious, clever, and amusing part of the speech was that in which he ridiculed Mr. Gladstone's defence of the glaring anomaly of admitting slave-grown sugar to be refined in bond, while it was not allowed to be entered for home-consumption. On this point he said:

"There are many other points that have been referred to in the course of this debate, to which I will not advert—there is one, however—'the refining' of the right honourable gentleman—that I cannot help touching on. Was such a distinction ever heard of? Not for the world are we to eat one ounce of the accursed thing; but we are to dress it up in a more pleasing form, and to export it to Hamburg, or

Leghorn—to all the coffee-houses of Italy or Germany! But we do not taste it;—no! We can stand up with a pharisaical air, and thank God that we are not as those Italians and Germans are, who eat slave-grown sugar. Clearly such distinctions as these in matters of morality are most absurd. I hardly know what to say to them. It seems to me very like the distinction drawn by the perjured witness: ‘What,’ said he, ‘I perjure myself! not for the world—no, no—I only kissed my thumb—I didn’t kiss the book—I wouldn’t do it on any account.’ But this is surely not the way in which we should treat considerations of this sort. I remember something very analogous to it in an old Spanish novel that I read some time ago, and which seems to me to be singularly apropos. A wandering lad, something after the fashion of Gil Blas, is taken into the service of a rich old silversmith—a most pious man, who is always telling his beads, who hears mass daily, and observes the feasts and fasts of the church with the utmost scrupulosity. He is always preaching honesty and piety. ‘Never,’ he constantly repeats to his young assistant, ‘never touch what is not your own; never take liberties with sacred things.’ Sacrilege, as uniting theft with profaneness, is the sin of which he has the deepest horror. One day while he is lecturing after his usual fashion, an ill-looking fellow comes into the shop, with a sack under his arm. ‘Will you buy these?’ says the visitor, and produces from the sack some church plate and a rich silver erueifix. ‘Buy them!’ cries the pious man. ‘No, nor touch them; not for the world. I know where you got them. Wretched that you are, have you no care for your soul?’ ‘Well, then,’ says the thief, ‘if you will not buy them, will you melt them down for me?’ ‘Melt them down!’ answers the silversmith, ‘that is quite another matter.’ He takes the chalices and the crucifix with a pair of tongs; the silver, thus in bond, is dropped into the crucible, melted, and

delivered to the thief, who lays down five pistoles and decamps with his booty. The young servant stares at this strange scene; but the master very gravely resumes his lecture. ‘ My son,’ he says, ‘ take warning by that sacrilegious knave, and take example by me. Think what a load of guilt lies on his conscience. You will see him hanged before long. But as to me, you saw that I would not even touch the stolen property. I keep these tongs for such occasions. And thus I thrive in the fear of God, and manage to turn an honest penny.’—But really I do say that the cause of morality is very much injured by admitting such distinctions as these—nothing can have a more immoral tendency than the quibbling away our moral obligations in this way, making distinctions of such a description as we have of late been introduced into theology, where it was attempted to be shown that a gentleman could hold the dogmas of Rome, and hold with them the best benefice in the Church of England. I hope we shall keep the sophistry of Tract XC. out of these debates at all events. Then, the right honourable gentleman wonders that people on the Continent say that all this is hypocrisy. Why, can anything be more natural? It is, I should say, perfectly natural; and, I should add, that it is all the effect of this new distinction. I do not think, till the right honourable baronet came into office, that the particular topic of our admitting slave-grown cotton and tobacco was ever mentioned, much less ever made a charge against an administration. But as soon as the right honourable baronet began to profess that he acted on a new and exalted moral principle, everybody began to inquire whether he consistently adhered to that principle; and the result of the inquiry is, that every foreign journal, whether in Germany or France, it signifies not what country, laughs at the philanthropy of England. ‘ Oh !’ say they, ‘ it is nothing but a farce, for it applies only to sugar, and affects not cotton, tobacco, or coffee. You

take the Havannah cigar, and grub up the plantations of the poor Irish freeman who wants to cultivate tobacco, and you even admit the sugar of New Orleans.' I care little about the abuse which foreign journalists or orators may throw on the Machiavelian policy of perfidious Albion. But I am sorry and ashamed when I feel that I have nothing to say in reply to their reflections."

The government measure was carried through both Houses, by large majorities; but Mr. Macaulay's admirable speech made an impression on the country which never could be effaced; and from the time that it was delivered, the abolition of the monopoly previously accorded to the West India interest, might be regarded as absolutely certain, and after no long lapse of time.

For some time the League had successfully exerted itself to show the farmers and agricultural labourers that their interests were not identified with the maintenance of the Corn Laws, as they had been taught to believe, and that those who sought their repeal were really the best friends of the agriculturists. This opinion was greatly strengthened by the ability with which Mr. Bright, a leading member of the League, exposed the injuries to which tenant-farmers were subjected by the oppressive operation of the Game Laws. Some surprise was expressed at this subject having engaged the attention of the League; but it is not difficult to show that there was a close and intimate connection between Game Laws and Corn Laws. The land-owners took to themselves the exclusive right of furnishing the people of the three kingdoms with food, and passed laws to prevent consumers from obtaining a supply elsewhere; they consequently aggravated the grievances of the artificial scarcity, which it was the object of the Corn Laws to produce, when they maintained multitudes of game merely for their amusement, by which large quantities of corn and other articles of

vegetable food are annually destroyed, and thus taken from the aggregate stock on which the country relies for the supply of its consumption. The government acceded to Mr. Bright's motion for a committee of inquiry, and this gave new and great offence to its agricultural supporters.

A still more remarkable and important measure was Mr. Cobden's motion for a committee for inquiry into the effects of legislative protection upon the interests of land-owners, farmers, and farm-labourers. We know from good authority that this was the speech by which Sir Robert Peel was most shaken, and we, therefore, regret that in our restricted limits we can give but one specimen of its evasive reasoning and unanswerable argument. After a close examination of the immediate and remote effects incident to protection, and particularly on the unnatural relations that a reliance on the Corn Laws produced between landlord and tenant, Mr. Cobden thus continued :—

“ I am going to contend, independent of protection and Corn Law, that Free-Trade in corn would be more advantageous to farmers—and with them I include labourers—than restriction ; to oblige the honourable member for Norfolk, I will take with them also the landlords ; and I contend that Free-Trade in corn and grain of every kind would be more beneficial to them than to any other class of the community. I should have contended the same before the passing of the late tariff ; but now I am prepared to do so with tenfold more force. What has the right honourable baronet done ? He has passed a law to admit fat cattle at a nominal duty. Some foreign fat cattle were selling in Smithfield the other day at about £15 or £16 per head, paying only about seven and a half per cent. duty ; but he has not admitted the raw material out of which these fat cattle are made. Mr. Huskisson did not act in this manner when he commenced his plan of Free-Trade. He began by admitting the raw

material before he permitted the manufactured article; but in your case you have commenced at precisely the opposite end, and have allowed Free-Trade in cattle instead of that upon which they are fattened. I say, give Free-Trade in that grain which goes to make the cattle. I contend, that by this protective system the farmers throughout the country are more injured than any other class in the community. I would take, for instance, the article of seeds, beginning with clover-seed. The honourable member for North Northamptonshire put a question the other night to the right honourable baronet at the head of the government. He looked so exceedingly alarmed, that I wondered what the subject was which created the apprehension. He asked the right honourable baronet whether he was going to admit clover-seed into this country? I believe clover-seed is to be excluded from the schedule of free importation. Now, I ask for whose benefit is this exception made? I ask the honourable gentleman, the member for North Northamptonshire, whether those whom he represents, the farmers of that district of the county, are, in the large majority of instances, the great sellers of clover-seed? I will undertake to say they are not. How many counties in England are there which are benefited by the protection of clover-seed? I will take the whole of Scotland. If there be any Scotch members present, I ask them whether they do not in their country import the clover-seed from England? They do not grow it. I undertake to say that there are not ten counties in the United Kingdom which are interested in the exportation of clover-seed out of their own borders. Neither have they any of this article in Ireland. But yet we have clover-seed excluded from the farmers, although they are not interested as a body in its protection at all. Again, take the article of beans. There are lands in Essex where they can grow them *alternately*. I find that beans come from that

district to Mark-lane, and I believe also that in some parts of Lincolnshire and Cambridgeshire they do the same; but how is it with the poor lands of Surrey, or the poor down-land of Wiltshire? Take the whole of the counties. How many of them are there which are exporters of beans, or send them to market? You are taxing the whole of the farmers who do not sell their beans, for the pretended benefit of a few counties or districts of counties where they do. Mark you, where they can grow beans on the stronger and better soils, it is not in one case out of ten that they grow them for the market. They may grow them for their own use; but where they do not cultivate beans, send them to market, and turn them into money, those farmers can have no interest whatever in keeping up the money-price of that which they never sell. Take the article of oats. How many farmers are there who ever have oats down on the credit side of their books, as an item upon which they rely for the payment of their rents? The farmers may, and do generally, grow oats for feeding their own horses; but it is an exception to the rule—and a rare exception too—where the farmer depends upon the sale of his oats to meet his expenses. Take the article of hops. You have a protection upon them for the benefit of the growers in Kent, Sussex, and Surrey; but yet the cultivators of hops have no protection in articles which they do not themselves produce. Take the article of cheese. Not one farmer in ten in the country makes his own cheese, and yet they and their servants are large consumers of it. But what are the counties which have the protection in this article? Cheshire, Gloucestershire, Wiltshire, part of Derbyshire, and Leicestershire. Here are some four or five dairy-counties having an interest in the protection of cheese: but recollect that those counties are peculiarly hardly taxed in beans and oats, because in those counties, where they are chiefly dairy-farms—where they

are most in want of artificial food for their cattle—there are the whole of the hilly districts ; and I hope my honourable friend the member for Nottingham is here, because he has a special grievance in this matter : he lives in Derbyshire, and very commendably employs himself in rearing good cattle upon the hills : but he is taxed for your protection for his oats, Indian corn, anything which he wants for feeding them. He told me only the other day, that he should like nothing better than to give up the protection on cattle, if they would only let him buy a thousand quarters of black oats for the consumption of his stock. Take the whole of the hilly districts, and the down-country of Wiltshire ; the whole of that expanse of downs in the south of England ; take the Cheviots, where the flock-masters reside, or the Grampians in Scotland ; and take the whole of Wales without exception —they are not benefited in the slightest degree by the protection on these articles ; but, on the contrary, you are taxing the very things they want. They require provender as abundantly and cheaply as they can get it. Allowing a free importation of food for cattle, is the only way in which those counties can improve the breed of thin stocks, and the only manner in which they can ever bring their land up to anything like a decent state of fertility. I will go farther and say, that farms with thin soil—I mean the stock farmers, which you will find in Hertfordshire and Surrey, farmers with large capitals, arable farmers—I say, those men are deeply interested in having a free importation of food for their cattle, because they have thin, poor land. The land of its ownself does not contain the means of its over-increased fertility ; and the only way is the bringing in an additional quantity of food from elsewhere, that they can bring up their farms to a proper state of cultivation.”

In conclusion, he said,—“There are politicians in the House ; men who look with an ambition—probably a justi-

fable one—to the honours of office. There may be men who—with thirty years of continuous service, having been raised into a state from which they can neither escape nor retreat—may be holding office, and high office, maintained there, probably, at the expense of their present convictions, which do not harmonize very well with their early convictions. I make allowances for them; but the great body of the honourable gentlemen opposite came up to this House, not as politicians, but as the farmers' friends, and protectors of the agricultural interests. Well, what do you propose to do? You have heard the prime minister declare that, if he could restore all the protection which you have had, that protection would not benefit agriculturists. Is that your meaning? If so, why not submit to it? and if it is not your conviction, you have falsified your mission in this House, by following the right honourable baronet out into the lobby, and opposing inquiry into the condition of the very men who sent you here. With mere politicians I have no right to expect to succeed in this motion. But I have no hesitation in telling you, that, if you give me a committee of this House, I will explode the delusion of agricultural protection. I will bring forward such a mass of evidence, and give you such a preponderance of talent and of authority, that when the blue book is published and sent forth to the world, as we can now send it, by our vehicles of information, your system of protection shall not live in the public opinion for two years afterwards. Politicians do not want that. This cry of protection has been a very convenient handle for politicians. The cry of protection carried the counties at the last election, and politicians gained honours, emoluments, and place, by it; you cannot set up for any such. Now, is that old tattered flag of protection, tarnished and torn as it is already, to be kept hoisted still in the counties for the benefit of politicians, or will you come forward honestly and fairly to inquire into

this question ? Why, I cannot believe that the gentry of England will be made mere drumheads to be sounded upon by others, to give forth unmeaning and empty sounds, and to have no articulate voice of their own. No. You are the gentry of England who represent the counties. You are the aristocracy of England. Your fathers led our fathers : you may lead us, if you will go the right way. But, although you have retained your influence with this country longer than any other aristocracy, it has not been by opposing popular opinion, or by setting yourselves against the spirit of the age. In other days, when the battle and the hunting-fields were the tests of manly vigour, why, your fathers were first and foremost there. The aristocracy of England are not like the aristocracy of France, the mere minions of a court ; nor are they like the hidalgos of Madrid, who dwindled into pygmies. You have been Englishmen. You have not shown a want of courage and firmness when any call has been made upon you. This is a new era. It is the age of improvement, it is the age of social advancement, not the age for war or for feudal sports. You live in a mercantile age, when the whole wealth of the world is poured into your lap. You cannot have the advantage of commercial rents and feudal privileges ; but you may be what you always have been, if you will identify yourselves with the spirit of the age. The English people look to the gentry and aristocracy of their country as their leaders. I, who am not one of you, have no hesitation in telling you, that there is a deep-rooted, a hereditary prejudice, if I may so call it, in your favour in this country. But you never got it, and you will not keep it, by obstructing the spirit of the age.

“ If you are indifferent to enlightened means of finding employment for your own peasantry ; if you are found obstructing that advance which is calculated to knit nations more together in the bonds of peace by means of commer-

cial intercourse; if you are found fighting against the discoveries which have almost given breath and life to material nature, and setting up yourselves as obstructives of that which the community at large has decreed shall go on; why, then, you will be the gentry of England no longer, and others will be found to take your place. And I have no hesitation in saying that you stand just now in a very critical position. There is a wide-spread suspicion that you have been tampering with the best feelings and with the honest confidence of your own country, in this cause. In everything you are doubted and suspected. Read your own organs, and you will see that this is the case. Well, now this is the time to show that you are not the mere party politicians which you are said to be. I have said that we shall be opposed in this measure by politicians: they do not want inquiry. But I ask you to go into this committee with me. I will give you a majority of country members. You shall have a majority of the Central Society in that committee: I ask you only to go into a fair inquiry as to the causes of the distress of your own population. I only ask that this matter may be fairly examined. Whether you establish my principle or yours, good will come out of the inquiry; and I do, therefore, beg and entreat the honourable, independent country gentlemen of this House that they will not refuse, on this occasion, to go into a fair, a full, and an impartial inquiry."

The effect of this able speech, which was published by the League in a cheap form, and circulated widely through the length and breadth of the land, but more especially in the agricultural districts, was immense; it converted farmers by the hundred to the principles of the League. This was not a little increased by a phrase in the speech delivered by Mr. Sidney Herbert, on the part of the government: he

advised the agricultural interest not to come *whining* to the legislature for help, but to help themselves.

The sincerity of those who called themselves the friends of the farmer was put to a severe test by Mr. Cobden's motion. This motion afforded the members of the protection societies a fair opportunity of substantiating the assertions which they made to the farmers on the hustings and at agricultural meetings, and should have been eagerly accepted, if right honourable and honourable gentlemen believed what they said. It was well remembered that, when the subject was first introduced, Mr. Stafford O'Brien declared that he would not only vote for the committee, but serve on it should the motion be granted. Since that time "a change had come o'er the spirit of his dream;" for though Mr. Cobden embodied in his motion the amendment of which Mr. Stafford O'Brien himself gave notice, that gentleman abandoned the farmers for the premier, and voted against the motion. The love professed to the farmers was insufficient to resist the soft seductions of the Treasury; Mr. S. O'Brien, like a political Lothario, abandoned his agricultural flirtation for a ministerial courtship, and left Ceres to bewail in abandonment the superior attractions of her rival in Downing Street. The prudential morality of the old song was forgotten. Mr. Stafford O'Brien did not observe the precept—

"Tis well to be merry and wise;  
"Tis well to be honest and true;  
"Tis well to be off with the old love,  
Before we are on with the new."

"The new love," or ministerial policy, which thus superseded the antiquated agricultural interest, manifested on Thursday night the practised arts of a finished coquette. Without metaphor, the course of the debate exhibited

“the farmers’ friends” in the most deplorable and pitiable condition. The command of this division of the supporters of the ministry was, as we have said, given for the night to Mr. Sidney Herbert, on the same principle as the junior corporal is appointed to drill the awkward squad. He was instructed, to prevent the county members from exposing themselves to the hazard of debate. In the course of his speech, the Secretary-at-War gave a very significant hint to the Commons, of the constitutional weight of the opinion of parliament in the deliberations of the cabinet; he described the investigations of parliamentary committees as mere farces, and, as the premier had given a pretty strong hint of his dislike of long speeches, it seemed probable that the legislative functions of parliament will sink down to the mere registration of ministerial edicts; inquiry seemed to be declared useless, and debate proscribed as inconvenient; the new guide to etiquette in the House of Commons appeared to be taken from the New Englander’s ballad at the commencement of the American war:—

“Jolly men of Boston, make no long orations;  
Jolly men of Boston, drink no strong potations;  
Bow, wow, wow.”

It was then new; it is not even now common in our parliamentary history to find all inquiry scouted as dangerous. In order to avoid any suspicion of wishing for such an investigation as might tend to the establishment of any particular opinions, Mr. Cobden distinctly offered to place the leading members of the protection-societies on the committee. Mr. Stafford O’Brien, however, declared that such a committee would not be “for farmers and labourers, but for political economists.” The force of this objection passes our powers of comprehension: every committee that ever sat or will sit to elicit facts, must be a committee *for* political economists, whose chief object is the collection

of facts ; so that Mr. Stafford O'Brien's words simply meant that a committee cannot be *for* farmers and labourers if it collects facts and elicits truth. This was rather an awkward confession for the chairman of the publication-committee of the Central Protection Society, though it is in perfect accordance with the principle observed in some of their publications, and particularly in Mr. Cayley's garbling of Adam Smith.

By their vote on this occasion, the pretended farmers' friends declared that the farmers had no case meritng the attention of the legislature ; and they thus gave a flat contradiction to the cry of agricultural distress, which they had themselves fostered and encouraged. Mr. Stafford O'Brien severely felt this dilemma, and more than once solicited the great wizard of Tamworth to extricate him from his difficulties. But Sir Robert Peel took a malicious pleasure in witnessing the embarrassment into which the county members were brought by their mutinous murmurs at agricultural meetings ; for the agriculturists found themselves in the condition described by Hudibras :—

“ And as a dog, committed close  
For some offence, by chance breaks loose,  
And quits the clog ; but all in vain,  
He still drags after him the chain.  
Thus, though their ankles had been quitted,  
Their hearts continue still committed.”

Further comment on a debate where all the argument was on one side, would be superfluous. When the wife and children of Sir Walter Ralagh implored King James, on their knees, to spare the remnant of their fortunes, that they might at least have the means of subsistence from their inheritance, the reply of that despicable monarch was, “ I maun ha' the land : I maun ha' it for Carr” (the basest of his minions.) The agricultural member adopted the course of the profligate pedant ; and when wives and children

apply for remission of taxes on their food, his answer is, "I maun ha' this share of your earnings : I maun ha' it for the monopolists." When such a resolution is adopted, it is no wonder that all debate should have been stifled, and all inquiry resisted.

But Mr. Cobden did not inflict half the injury on the question of agricultural protection as they wrought themselves by raising a fierce debate in opposition to Sir Robert Peel's proposed remission of the duties on grease and lard. The dissatisfaction of the extreme Protectionists with the premier had now assumed the form of an open quarrel; Mr. Benjamin D'Israeli, in particular, charged Sir Robert Peel with having deserted his party. "The right honourable baronet, at the head of her Majesty's government," he said, "had once avowed that he was prouder of being leader of the country-gentlemen of England, than of being entrusted with the confidence of sovereigns. But where are the country-gentlemen of England now? They are discovering the difference between the hours of courtship and the hours of possession ; little now is said about them ; when the belovèd object has ceased to charm, it is useless to appeal to the feelings. Instead of listening to their complaints, the premier sends down his valet, a well-behaved person, to make it known that we are to have no 'whining' here.\* Such is the fate of the great agricultural interest—that beauty which everybody wooed and one deluded. There is a fatality in such charms, and we now seem to approach the catastrophic of her career. Protection appears to be in about the same condition that Protestantism was in 1828. The country will draw its moral. For my part, if we are to have Free Trade, I, who honour genius, prefer that such measures should be proposed by the honourable member

\* This allusion to Mr. S. Herbert's expression in the debate last week was received with vociferous cheering and loud laughter from the Opposition.

for Stockport, than by one who, though skilful in parliamentary manœuvres, has tampered with the generous confidence of a great people and of a great party. For myself, I care not what will be the result. Dissolve, if you like, the parliament you have betrayed, and appeal to the people, who, I believe, mistrust you. For me there remains this, at least—the opportunity of expressing thus publicly my belief that a Conservative government is an organized hypocrisy."

Mr. D'Israeli sat down amid cheers which lasted several minutes, and none more eagerly joined in the applause than those who, a few short months before, had been the most devoted adherents of Sir Robert Peel. But ludicrous as was this scene, it sank into tameness when compared with the exhibition which the Protectionists made of themselves in the grease-and-lard debate.

Never did any member of the League charge the protectionists with such mean and mercenary motives as they themselves unwittingly avowed; never did we conceive that any legislature could exhibit such a scene of peddling, huckstering selfishness, confessing its preposse purpose of limiting the food of the poor in order to swell the purses of the rich, as was displayed in the debate on the customs' duties. Grease and lard were the subjects for which the monopolists claimed the continuance of protection, because they said that removal of the duty on these articles might possibly limit the demand for their kitchen-stuff and their dripping. Mr. Bramston opened the debate by expressing a fear that the removal of the duty on grease might afford an opportunity for the introduction of butter under that title—butter, in the opinion of the Bramston class, being far too great a luxury for the stomachs of operatives and labourers. With amiable simplicity, so perfect as to be beyond the consciousness of the ridicule it provoked, Sir

George Clerk expounded the paternal care which the government exercised in the abridgment of the food of the labouring classes. He assured the House, that when butter was imported under the name of grease, it was immediately mixed with tar, so as to render it utterly unfit for human food. In this state, however, he declared that it was very fit for greasing the backs of sheep; and he dwelt with great complacency on the scientific merits of the process which thus kept butter from the stomachs of the poor, to improve the flocks of the wealthy sheep-owners. Poisoning of food thus seemed to have become an important part of our financial system ever since Gladstone expressed his approbation of the policy of the Chinese in poisoning their wells: the senior Gladstone, in the name of the West India interest, demanded the adulteration of sugar; Sir George Clerk dwelt upon the filthy process by which butter was rendered unfit for food, as if he were describing not merely the most innocent but the most laudable thing in the world. Artistic starvation and scientific famine appeared to be the avowed objects of the policy of monopoly. As arsenic was allowed to be imported duty free, and as the use of it might be about as cheap as tar and rather more effectual, it was suggested to the friends of the labourers and the patrons of the distressed needlewomen, that the mixture of arsenic with foreign butter would be an improvement on their plans for confining the labourers to limited quantities of dry bread, and preventing the needlewomen from adding a relish to their taxed loaves.

The debate continued for several hours before the protectionists discovered the ridicule with which they were unconsciously loading their cause. At length they perceived the tendency of their exhibition, and suddenly ceased their opposition, allowing the two obnoxious items to take their place in the tariff without a division. During this strange scene, Sir Robert Peel acted the part of a tranquil

spectator; his mind was made up to progressive advance in the reduction of the import duties on articles of consumption, and he was not sorry to find the more obstinate protectionists adopting a course which was certain to deprive them even of their natural influence with the House and the country. Once only he tripped: in the debate on the auction duties, the remission of which was opposed on the ground that it would be more desirable to take off some tax that pressed more directly on the agricultural interest, Sir Robert Peel warned his opponents that if they retained these duties, instead of getting a reduction on the county rates, they might find the surplus applied to the removal of their protection on butter and cheese. Cobden at once pointed on this ineptious expression, and taunted the protectionists in the following terms:—

“The appeal of the right honourable gentleman to the agricultural members, is certainly anything but flattering. He says, ‘If you vote for the member for Dorsetshire, there will be a surplus of £300,000, which, without relieving the agricultural interest, may be applied to the remission of the duties on butter and cheese. Remember, you are interested in preserving these duties.’ Did we ever say anything so insulting to you as that? I have sometimes said at Covent-garden that there should be written over this house, ‘Dealers in corn and cattle, and no competition allowed with the shop over the water.’ But I never said you were cheesemongers and dealers in butter. Is it not most degrading to you to say that the wretched serfs who earn eight or nine shillings a week cannot purchase butter or cheese at a somewhat cheaper rate, because you are interested in keeping up the prices of these necessaries? I am not misrepresenting the right honourable gentleman; but I must say, I am surprised that he should allow his meaning to be so transparent, as that the country should be able to understand

perfectly the motives by which his supporters in this House are actuated. I shall vote for the reduction of the auction duty, and also for the abolition of the duties on butter and cheese. I hope, when the honourable member for Dumfries brings the latter forward, the country will be prepared to judge of the motives of those who vote against it."

The grease-and-cheese debates furnished abundant theme for ridicule and invective to the Anti-Corn Law orators and writers throughout the country. In fact they became events of immense importance in the Free-Trade struggle, and we cannot therefore pass over the harsh and satirical comments to which they exposed the protectionists, without notice. No better specimen of the wit and invective which these debates provoked, could be found than in the speech delivered by Mr. W. J. Fox, at one of the League meetings in Covent-Garden, part of which we extract.

"All that I have ever said here about the aristocracy has been said of certain members of that body, not in their capacity of aristocrats, but in their occupation as tradesmen. In that character they are, I apprehend, most legitimate objects of animadversion here. A man is not to be protected if he keeps a chandler's shop and cheats, because he happens to be one of the members of the aristocracy. This is what I complain of. They keep a great chandler's shop, and they look to every minute article in their store, how they can pervert the power of legislation to make the community pay more for the benefit of aristocracy. There was a time when trading at all was thought inconsistent with the possession of that dignity. Your feudal baron did not mind robbing by the strong hand, but he turned away with contempt from robbing by the short weight of a protective duty. So far back as the days of Elizabeth, the intellect of the country had begun to mark out for derision the trading propensities of the members of the feudal aristocracy.

In Beaumont and Fletcher's 'Beggar's Bush,' there is a dispute between a certain military gentleman proud of his aristocratical position, and a couple of merchants. He tells them that 'this is certain, if once you buy and sell, your gentry's gone.' To which the merchant retorts—

‘Do not you, the lords  
Of land (if you be any), sell the grass,  
The corn, the straw, the milk, the cheese—’

Then the other merchant interposes—

‘REMEMBER BUTTER! do not LEAVE OUT butter!’

And they never have left out butter to this very day. Only they have improved upon the practice of those days by spoiling butter which is not the produce of their own land, with the filthiness of tar. Now, when nobles become tradesmen, when dukes become dealers in various commodities, when the memory of the Plantagenet serves to make a better barter at Mark-lane, why, I think, it is time for us to call out and say that this is unfair dealing with the other trades-people of the country. I confess I never picture to myself—it has got such hold of one's fancy—the Duke of Richmond, but with his coronet on his head, with a corn-sample in his pocket, a salmon in one hand, and a whisky bottle in the other, and enthroned upon a butter firkin. Then I study this figure as I would ‘Quarles' Emblems;’ for the coronet is practically connected with all the rest by the legislative power that enacts protective duties. The coronet rubs the sample till the grains are more golden; the coronet is thrown into the scale with the salmon, and makes the fish-eater pay a higher price for it; the coronet is a false bottom to the whisky bottle, and cheats the purchaser of his glenlivet; and last of all, if the butter be not his own, the coronet makes a hole in the firkin, in order to pour in the pitch and tar. Why, this incongruity, this perversion of all dignity of station, and whatever is most honourable and majestic in

legislative power,—this cannot save a set of tradesmen ! We cannot forget the one character in the other : they blend all together, and we look at the whole as peers of parliament and compeers of pedlers ; conservators of the constitution, and of canary seed ; lords of land, and of lard ; knights of the garter, and the grease-pot. Well is it that there are men of a different sort of temperament in that body ; that there are those who (slightly altering the burden of Robert Burns' famous song) can say of themselves at least, and a few noble coadjutors—

‘ A lord 's a man for a' that ; ’

who feel that society has done much for them, and are desirous in turn of doing something for society ; who have their sense of the responsibility of station combined with their sense of the responsibility of legislation ; who are not ennobled by their title, but their title ennobled by their minds and hearts ; who move surrounded by blessings which redeem the name of the class with which they are associated, and to whom the rest must owe it that the very name of hereditary nobility does not become a foul stench in the nostrils of humanity.”

We cannot omit this opportunity of testifying to the eminent services to the cause of Free Trade rendered by Mr. Fox, the most eloquent of its advocates. His speeches were translated into French, German, and Italian ; they were read with as much eagerness beyond the Atlantic, as they were heard in this country. Great as were his powers of satire and invective, they were surpassed by the eloquent sublimity with which he depicted the religious influences of Free Trade, and its perfect accordance with the dispensations of Providence. One such passage we shall extract, because it received universal applause both in Europe and America :

“ Our principles are not merely as old as political economy, they are, in truth, as old as the history of mankind,

the facts of which are the materials of political economy. They are intertwined with the records of the prosperity and the calamity of nations. We can trace them through the long annals of ancient and modern times. We trace them back beyond this, even to the very constitution of nature and the globe itself. They are the dictates of philosophy, interpreted by the system of things in which we live, and of which we form a portion; for when that mighty Power who spread abroad the heavens, fixed suns in their central position, and rolled the planets in their orbits, surrounded them with belts and satellites, measuring the course, limitless as it seems, of the wandering comet, which, in its wild career, moves from the intensity of light to the deepest darkness; binding all together by the principle of gravitation, and thus united it to other systems through all the infinity of being,—when that Power fashioned this earth of ours, it made a reflex of the combined, harmonized, and mutually dependent system, which is exhibited to the astronomer when he gazes on the heavens,—it endowed one climate with one species of fertility, and another with another, and surrounded the earth with those zones—temperate, torrid, and frigid—constituting climates, sunny or moist, in all their diversities, and gave the luscious vine to grow upon the banks of the Rhine and the Rhone, and enriched the spice islands with their fragrant products,—it spread the broad and vast prairies of America, sufficient to grow corn for the whole world's consumption; planted the tea-groves of China; endowed the sugar-cane with its sweetness; and gave to Britain its coasts, minerals, and industry: and by these, as by the mutual dependence of the heavenly bodies, it said, ‘All these belong to each other! Let their influence be reciprocal: let one minister to another: be the interest of each the interest of all, and let all minister to each: they are one in wisdom and beneficence, and show forth as re-

splendently as the starry heavens, the glory of a benevolent Providence.' ”

In another part of this magnificent address, the orator illustrated the peaceful tendencies of Free Trade, by referring to the questions in dispute between England and the United States, respecting the Oregon territory. The passage has historical importance, for it had a very powerful effect in allaying the warlike passions which were beginning to be developed in both countries, and which, if left unchecked, might have involved England and America in sanguinary and senseless hostilities. Mr. Fox said,

“ Why, what is this territory they are disputing about? There are some 350,000 square miles of it, of whieh it seems we are claiming a barren 100,000, or therabouts. What are they worth? What is the value of all the land that exists without man upon it, with his industry and products? Much of this Oregon territory is a desert—the great Sahara of America; the Botany Bay of the red man’s banishment. There are now upon it some few hundreds of Indians and half-castes connected with the Hudson’s Bay company; there are certain trappers, hunters, and squatters from the United States. Then there are some Indian tribes there, who rejoice in such names as ‘ Flathead,’ ‘ Slitnose,’ ‘ Pointed-heart.’ The buffaloes are the lords of the soil, unless when the game-laws of these Indians interfere. A great portion of it is mere lava, the overflowing of volcanoes; a ‘ city ’ is talked of; but scarcely any settlement makes it, as territory, of any value. Quarrel about this! Why, we might just as well be invited by Peel and Polk to fight about mountains in the moon. But let men have something to do with it; let those who have found no preferable home go there, and see what effect they can produce upon the best portions of the soil; as their numbers increase, and their exertions tell, it will soon become more valuable.

And when man has occupied it, when industry has driven its ear of peaceful conquest around the borders of that vast land; when towns have arisen and cities appeared with their thronging numbers; when the Rocky Mountains are tunnelled, and rail and canal have united the Atlantic and Pacific; when the waters of the Columbia swarm with steam-boats;—why, then will be the time to talk of the Oregon territory. Then, without a regiment or line-of-battle ship, without bombarding any town whatever, Free Trade will conquer the Oregon territory for us, and will conquer the United States for us also—as far as it is desirable either for us or them that there should be any conquest whatever in the case—Free Trade will establish there all the insignia of conquest. When their products come here, and those of our industry return, there will scarcely be a labourer upon the pine-forest that he is clearing, but will wear upon his back, to his very shirt, the livery of Manchester. The knife with which he carves his game will have the mark of Sheffield upon its blade, as a testimony of our supremacy. Every handkerchief waved upon the banks of the Missouri, will be the waving of an English banner from Spitalfields. Throughout the country there will be marks of our skill and greatness, and tribute paid to us, received not by warriors or governors, not coming directly into the national treasury, but flowing into the pockets of the industrious and toiling poor—refreshing trade, and enriching those who pursue it, giving them an imperial heritage beyond the wide Atlantic. Why, they will be conquered, for they will work for us; and what can the conquered do more for their masters? They will grow corn for us, they will grind it, and send us the flour; they will fatten pigs for us upon the peaches of their large wooded grounds; they will send us whatever they can produce that we want, and without asking us to put our hand in our pocket, in order by taxation to pay a governor there

for quarrelling with their representatives, or soldiery to bayonet their multitudes. There is nothing upon earth worthier the name of empire than this ; it is a nobler kind of dominion, less degrading both for the one party and for the other, less debasing than any sovereignty that was ever won by armies ; and, being so won, reluctantly swayed by sceptres."

We make no apology for presenting this long extract : its eloquence, its truth, and its everlasting importance, more than justify the repetition. Would that all those who profess themselves the friends of peace were influenced by its sentiments ! The peace of nations cannot be secured by parchment treaties ; the bonds of union between separate countries are not formed of red tape. Mutual harmony is the result of mutual interest ; universal peace can come only from universal freedom of intercourse. Every restraint on commerce is a provocative to war, every relaxation of restriction is an invitation to amity. To obtain this brotherhood of nations, was the great object for which the League was formed : Nature invited to it, God ordained it ; when the Saviour was born into the world it was proclaimed, when he was taken away it was bequeathed. "Tell it out among the heathen, that the Lord is King," and that His royalty should not be contravened by an aristocracy either of acres or sugar-hogsheads : "He bringeth forth grass for the cattle, and green herb for the service of men, that he may bring food out of the earth, and wine that maketh glad the heart of man, and oil to make him a cheerful countenance, and bread to strengthen man's heart."

The influence of the League was signally manifested during the spring by the opening of a Bazaar in aid of its funds at Covent-Garden Theatre, to which immense contributions were sent from various parts of the country. Viewed merely as an exposition of British manufactures,

it was one of the most wondrous displays of taste and skill in the arts of production ever seen in the world. During the seventeen days that it remained open, twenty-five thousand pounds were obtained by sales and admissions; the goods remaining unsold in London subsequently realized about five thousand pounds in Manchester. Thus thirty thousand pounds were the result of this single appeal to the manufacturing interests of England; and there could be no more decisive evidence of their general determination not to relax in their efforts until they had obtained the Repeal of the Corn Laws.

Such a manifestation, to which the history of the world affords no parallel, necessarily produced a strong effect on the government and the parliament. Lord John Russell gave some indications of his readiness to abandon his favourite compromise of a fixed duty, and his willingness to join the League in demanding a perfectly Free Trade in Corn. On the 26th of May he brought forward his long-promised motion on the condition of the labouring classes, and proposed the following resolutions:—

“ 1. That the present state of political tranquillity, and the recent revival of trade, afford to this House a favourable opportunity to consider of such measures as may tend permanently to improve the condition of the labouring classes.

“ 2. That those laws which impose duties, usually called protective, tend to impair the efficiency of labour, to restrict the free interchange of commodities, and to impose on the people unnecessary taxation.

“ 3. That the present Corn Law tends to check improvements in agriculture, produces uncertainty in all farming speculations, and holds out to the owners and occupiers of land prospects of special advantage which it fails to secure.

“ 4. That this House will take the said laws into consideration, with a view to such cautious and deliberate arrangements as may be most beneficial to all classes of her Majesty’s subjects.

“ 5. That the freedom of industry would be promoted by a careful revision of the law of parochial settlement which now prevails in England and Wales.

“ 6. That a systematic plan of colonization would partially relieve those districts of the country where the deficiency of employment has been most injurious to the labourers in husbandry.

“ 7. That the improvements made of late years in the education of the people, as well as its more general diffusion, have been seen with satisfaction by this House.

“ 8. That this House will be ready to give its support to measures, founded on liberal and comprehensive principles, which may be conducive to the further extension of religious and moral instruction.

“ 9. That a humble address be presented to her Majesty, to lay the foregoing resolutions before her Majesty.”

Lord John Russell’s speech, introductory to these resolutions on the improvement of the condition of the labouring classes, was of an excellency which all parties must have felt much pleasure in frankly and cordially acknowledging. It was a speech indicative of generous sympathies and enlightened opinions. It was an able review of the causes which had depressed and degraded the industrious millions of the community, a spirited protest against the injustice and folly of the laws “usually called protective,” and an earnest demonstration of the necessity of commercial and industrial reform to the social and moral elevation of the labouring classes. This speech had the high merit of being the first attempt made by the head of a parliamentary party to bring before the legislature the whole

condition of the labouring classes, together with a definite proposal of ameliorative measures, based, so far as they go, on sound economical principles. It was the first systematic effort made by a man of the highest parliamentary standing, to work out the objects of philanthropy by the light of the truths of political economy. We cannot but award high praise to the statesman who, in the face of a reluctant and hostile House of Commons, formally adopted, as the great end of his policy, the permanent improvement of the condition of the labouring classes ; and, as the first and foremost of his means, the emancipation of their labour.

As a Free-Trade speech, this of Lord John Russell's was of great value. It contained the whole of the case set forth by the League. Nothing could be better than his lordship's broad and emphatic assertion of the principles of industrial and commercial liberty, and of the inseparable practical connection of these principles with every interest nearest to the heart of the philanthropist and the Christian. He vindicated, in the strongest language, the right of labour to choose its own market. He condemned the protective system as " altogether vicious and unsound." He denounced the Corn Law—in terms which showed that Mr. Cobden's arguments had not been lost upon him—as especially injurious to the agriculture which it pretended to protect, as cruelly deluding the farmer with perpetual promises which it perpetually broke. He gave up his eight-shilling fixed duty, as a thing not to be thought of for a moment, "after all the discussion which has occurred." And, what is more, he gave up every one of the grounds on which a fixed duty could, with any decent show of reason, be defended. A fixed duty for revenue he would not hear of, for "corn is one of the worst articles you can tax." A fixed duty for protection was out of the question, of course, for he had declared that "protection is the bane of agriculture." "Peculiar burdens" were put out of court

by a very summary process: "We can look into the peculiar burdens," said his lordship, "when we have done away with the other peculiarities of the landlords' case." And, best of all, the Whig leader seemed ready to do at once what he had to do. He saw the folly and madness of waiting for another crisis of national distress. *Now is the time*, he urged, to enfranchise trade and industry—now, with political tranquillity and leisure, with bread at Free-Trade prices, with revived commerce and prosperous manufactures—now, with population growing at an almost fearful rate of increase—now, before another bad harvest brings "the cry of hunger up to these walls." The expression was prophetic, the *cry* came with resistless force ere a few short months had elapsed.

The debate lasted two nights. Sir James Graham moved the previous question, in a speech the greater part of which might have been delivered by a supporter of Lord John Russell's motion. Sir John Tyrrell bitterly reproached the ministers for having abandoned the agricultural interest by which they had been raised to power. Mr. C. P. Villiers seized upon Sir. James Graham's admissions, and ably demonstrated that they made him an excellent witness for the repeal of the Corn Laws. Mr. P. Howard complained of the want of caution evinced in propounding such resolutions. Mr. Bickham Escott approved of the steps which the government had taken in the direction of Free Trade, but said that the time was come when ministers must be prepared to go much further than they had hitherto gone. Lord Howick complained of the apathy and indifference to the condition of the working classes displayed in the debate, and said, in conclusion,—“The time for compromise has gone by; the conclusion to which parliament ought to come is, that the system which takes the bread out of the mouth of the labouring classes ought to be completely abolished.”

Sir John Hanmer defended the Corn Laws, and in doing so, more than hinted his want of confidence in the sincerity and consistency of the government. It was late in the second night of the debate when Sir Robert Peel rose, and began his speech by adverting to Lord Howick's remarks on the apathy by which the debate had been characterized. He said,—

“Sir,—If I thought that this indifference, this apathy, could be justly charged upon this House—if I thought that when the question really was the improvement of the condition of the lower classes, any indifference was shown in this House on a matter of such extreme importance, not merely to these classes alone, but to every other class of the community—I should think that this House gave a decisive proof of its incompetence to discharge the functions intrusted to it. But I believe that both this indifference and apathy are to be attributed to the circumstance alone, that there is a predominant feeling that the mode in which the noble lord has brought forward the subject is not calculated to lead to any practical result. Lord Ashley certainly had manifested anxiety for the interests of the working classes; but then the measures which he proposed, unlike Lord John Russell's resolutions, were practical. I will not imitate the noble lord; I will not take the course he has thought fit to adopt, and remind him that there were those on each side of him who did not attend the debate during that dreary period when it was almost impossible to keep a House together. Perhaps the House is not aware that at an early period of the evening an unsuccessful attempt was made at terminating the debate by counting out the House. I am sure that circumstance did not arise from any disrespect to the working classes, but was solely attributable to the deeply prevailing conviction that the noble lord's resolutions as proposed could not be of the least practical benefit to them.” He then proceeded to examine in detail

the arguments advanced by the noble mover. He reminded Lord John Russell, who now recommended systematic colonization, that, when in office, he had not adopted a specific plan proposed by the Colonial and Emigration Commissioners. For his own part, before he assented to any scheme of colonization, he should like to see the details. He then referred to what government had done for education :

"I admit that considerations of economy, perhaps I should say parsimony, should not induce us to spare any vote for the purposes of education, but we have done nothing with regard to this subject of education, to disentitle us to the confidence of the House. I think one great object in promoting education, ought to be to carry out the system that may be adopted by the voluntary co-operation of the people themselves. Depend upon it, in this free country any system of education in which the government intervenes, and which is superintended by government-inspectors, will be of little avail, unless those whose moral duty it is to contribute some of their means to the promotion of education, zealously co-operate with government for the purpose. Grants of public money are not alone what is necessary, you must also have the voluntary co-operation of those whose aid and countenance are essential to any scheme of education, if you hope to have it succeed. It is not merely that the aid of such persons is necessary, but I know of no better connecting link between the lower and upper classes, than the voluntary exertions of those who are willing to contribute to the improvement of classes, to whose industry and labour they owe such great obligations. The noble lord asks us to give our support to measures founded on liberal and comprehensive principles, for the further extension of education. Why, we have lately had practical experience of the result of our dealing with the question. It shows me that we ought not to be too lavish of our promises to

carry out measures founded on liberal and comprehensive principles. It is very easy to make affirmations, and to give pledges: but let us recollect the contest in which we were engaged last session. We also thought that we were acting on a policy founded on liberal principles, when we undertook to improve the education of the Roman Catholics of Ireland; but when we come to the details, I think we may rejoice in not having given any pledges which may not be verified. I therefore think it is better that we should deal with practical measures, than promise beforehand that we will give our support to a resolution. I do not therefore so much object to the resolutions of the noble lord because they mix together subjects that would require separate consideration, but I object to them because they invite us to pledge ourselves to the passing of measures with respect to local settlement, colonization, and education; and because we thereby raise expectations which, when the time comes for practically carrying them out, we cannot agree among ourselves to carry."

In conclusion, he repeated his resolution to resign the government so soon as he found that he had not sufficient parliamentary strength to conduct it efficiently.

After an able reply from Lord John Russell, the resolutions were rejected by a majority of seventy-eight; but the country looked not to the division but to the debate, and from that, most men inferred that the two great leaders, Lord John Russell and Sir Robert Peel were equally convinced that the principle of protection could no longer be maintained by the legislature.

On the 10th of June, Mr. Villiers, for the last time, made his annual<sup>1</sup> motion for the repeal of the Corn Laws. His speech was one of singular ability, and, considering that the subject was almost exhausted by repeated discussion, it was particularly remarkable for the novelty of its illustrations,

and the striking originality of its views. It would be impossible to give any complete abstract of a speech which occupied three hours in the delivery, but we must insert merely the conclusion :

“ Surely it is a natural right for the people of this or of any country to have the freest access to the means of subsistence which honest industry can offer to them. Sooner or later that must be conceded. Why delay it? Is it that I ask too much? How can that be said, when two measures in different degrees of moderation had been received with as little favour as any motion that he ever had made. The noble lord proposed a fixed duty: he did so, to meet the scruples of those who might object to this measure. How was he treated? The member of Gateshead asked you to add to the stock here by a little grain from the antipodes. He was told that he ought to deal with the general question. Well, here is the general question. How are you going to deal with it? Your experience recommends you strongly to abolish the law. Your only fear could be a reduction of price here; yet how has that operated? You expected that corn would be at 56s.: it has been at 45s. You say every advantage has followed from this circumstance, even in the agricultural districts. You say that our consumption is twenty millions of quarters, and you tell us that 10s. a quarter has been saved upon it. Well, that is ten millions sterling paid less out of the general means for one article, and has of course left so much to be expended on the consumption of other articles, the result of British industry. How would it have been otherwise than an additional blessing, had the price been sufficiently reduced to cause another ten millions to be saved? The whole financial policy of the honourable gentleman is founded, if I understand it, on the ground of lowering the cost of living; he expects that we shall not feel additional taxation, if provisions essential to life are

cheap. Considering what the taxes are in this country, how is it possible that the cost of living can be too low? A short time since, the honourable gentleman was horrified at being informed that a body of great men in the north had combined to raise the price of an essential to the poor man's comfort, by making the article scarce. He reproved them publicly in the House; he called upon them, as good citizens, to cease to employ such unhallowed means for the oppression of the poor. This he said with respect to coals. How is it that he does not apply this to corn? The poor can procure fire without coal more easily than they can get nourishment without corn? I will only add one word more, which is as to the appropriateness of the moment at which I make the proposition: it is rendered peculiarly so by the lowness of the price. I have been astonished that the Home Secretary the other night—so shrewd a reasoner in this matter—should have supposed that, when the price is low in this country, the landlord wants high protection most; why, it is the time when he wants it least, for the price itself makes the market so much worse for the foreigner, that the slightest addition to the difficulty of bringing the grain so far is felt. It is therefore precisely at such a time that such a duty as 4s. would operate: it might keep out all American grain just by that amount, if the price here is very low: but when the price is very high, the duty might be double that amount, and the community here would not be worse off. It is the difference of price here and abroad that determines the operation of a duty; when the price here is low, this country is more on a level with foreign countries, and then the distance is a great protection. Now, if the law be changed, the price might fall a little here and rise a little abroad, and there would be but little come in; and at present there is but little wanted. I will now say no more. I will not conclude by any appeal to the interests supposed to be favoured by this law, and who

preponderate in the House so greatly. Everything has been addressed to them by abler men than could touch their feelings of honour, honesty, justice, prudence, and humanity; and, if that is still unavailing, I am sure that I could add nothing that would have more effect. I will only say, that, if they resist all concession, none shall regret it more than I have done at any other time, because never has the time been so fitting for the change, nor will they appear in future to have been ever so wrong in refusing it."

Mr. Oswald seconded the motion. It was opposed by Mr. Christopher, on the ground that landlords were limited in their operations, and must depend on corn whether they liked it or not. Mr. Mitchell showed the injurious operation of protection on the natural trade in corn. Mr. Buck defended protection; and was answered by Mr. Mark Philips. Sir James Graham admitted the soundness of Free-Trade principles, but was adverse to any sudden change which might derange all the commercial and social relations of the country. Mr. Bright reproved laws which enhanced the price of food to the meritorious but suffering artisan, to the industrious but distressed operative, and declared his conviction that such laws could not long be maintained in defiance of the increasing strength of enlightened public opinion. Dr. Bowring, Mr. G. H. Cavendish, and Lord Ebrington, spoke in favour of the motion, and, as no attempt was made to answer them on the agricultural side, a cry was raised for a division, and the gallery was on the point of being cleared for a division, when Mr. Cobden rose, and powerfully exposed the inconsistencies into which Sir James Graham had fallen. To the charge of *rashness* brought against the League, Mr. Cobden thus replied:—

"The right honourable gentleman talks of the Free Traders being rash. The same argument, if argument it can be called, has been used the last time that my honourable friend

(Mr. Villiers) brought forward his motion. It is one of the stock arguments of honourable gentlemen opposite. Is it rashness to propose the change now? Are we not rather the rash men who are passing over this opportunity of effecting it? We are ourselves preparing by our present hesitancy to invest the Free Traders with an amount of moral power of which we are extremely jealous. The time will yet come when we shall have a recurrence of those scenes which have been often witnessed within the memory of the youngest of us. When that time does arrive, who then will be regarded as the rash men? Will it be the men who, like my honourable friend the member for Wolverhampton, have the foresight to urge upon the government to prepare for the inevitable revulsion; or will it be those who have avowed themselves Free Traders, who allege that this is a question only of time, and yet who are willing to put off this occasion, and to walk with their eyes open (not blind-folded) to the very brink of a precipice, and into that gulf out of which ten thousand mischiefs and dangers may arise? There is every danger—there is great rashness, in slighting the present opportunity. What is the danger which we have to fear from another scarcity? There are at this moment, only 300,000 quarters of foreign corn in this country. The next harvest will, in all probability, be perhaps some weeks later than previous ones, and before next harvest the people of this country will have eaten closer up the amount of corn on hand than in former years: yet there are only at the present moment 300,000 quarters of foreign corn in bond! Was there ever such rashness, as for 27,000,000 of people, who are possessed of a capital that could grasp the produce of the whole world, and who could mortgage it before it was grown, to leave themselves in this dilemma! Under a different system, what would have been the position of the country? Instead of having 300,000 quarters of foreign wheat in the

country, we might have had 4,000,000 or 5,000,000. That would be brought in, not by the government, but by the application of capital ; and can the country more legitimately apply its capital than for the purpose of providing against a scarcity of food ? The Dutch, in ancient times, held 700,000 quarters of foreign corn in their granaries. That was probably sufficient for a year's consumption. What are the Dutch as capitalists compared with the capitalists of England ? We might as easily hold 20,000,000 of quarters as the Dutch held 700,000 two centuries ago. The restrictive system which we have had fostered and bolstered up, has brought us back to the barbarous position in which this country was placed five or six hundred years ago, with this sole difference, that then, from the bad state of the roads and the want of the means of communication, counties used to suffer from famine ; whereas now we are setting at defiance all the lights of science, all the discoveries of modern times, and all the improvements founded upon these discoveries, and are bringing ourselves into the same peril as a nation, as we formerly had to encounter only by counties. Why are we making these amazing strides in physical science, laying nations alongside of each other, as provinces had been united before ? Why are we to have railways and steamboats ? Why are we to go on, uniting nations together by all the discoveries of modern times, if legislation is to lag behind, and prevent us from availing ourselves of those advantages which it is the interest and the birthright of the people to derive from these discoveries, and the consequences to which they lead ? I will not allow the right honourable baronet, with his proverbial caution, to take from the honourable member for Wolverhampton what I consider his due. He (Mr. Villiers) is a man of cautious foresight. He is the man of prudence and forecast, who would make provision for future evils ; and on the government and on those who lead them, when they

should lead their followers—on the government rests the responsibility of anything which may happen from the present absurd and anomalous state of our laws.”

When Mr. Cobden concluded, it was considerably past midnight; and as the night was hot, and the House inconveniently crowded, some impatience was manifested to come to a division. Mr. G. Bankes, however, rose to defend the cause of protection; and meeting the disapprobation with which he was received on all sides, and more especially from his own party, by a threat to move an adjournment, he gave a tedious sketch of the history of protection, which he asserted to have been the cause of the past prosperity of the country.

Lord John Russell followed, and made the House merry by his exposure of Mr. Bankes’s “curious specimens of historical erudition.” He then entered into the debate with a freshness of spirit and animation in which he was rarely accustomed to indulge, producing on the House the impression, that he was once more a candidate for office, and that he was bidding for the premiership by offering greater advantages to the Free Traders than they could possibly obtain from Sir Robert Peel. In the course of his very exciting speech, he said—

“ I do believe that this Corn Law, as it at present stands, cannot long be maintained. I see its fall signified, not only by the ability of the attacks made upon it, but also by the manner in which it is defended in this House. I cannot conceive, unless it be better defended than it has been hitherto, that it is likely to last for many years to come. Well, then, if that be the case—if there is any truth in that representation, why should not the landed gentlemen take advantage of the present situation of things? Why not avail themselves of a moment of calm and quiet to make any alteration with coolness and deliberation?”

Sir Robert Peel opposed the motion at some length. He said that he would not taunt Lord John Russell with being able to vote for the motion this year, though he could not vote for the identical proposition last year. "But I think we must be fast approaching that period when the noble lord will not only give his support to the first two parts of the resolutions of the two honourable gentlemen, but cordially concur with the others. And when the noble lord says that the effect of the existing Corn Law is to increase the rents of the landlords, and advises them to consider what must be the invidious effect of that in the eyes of a scrutinizing and intelligent population, let me remind him that that objection applies with equal force to his own position."

Sir Robert contended, that the increased consumption of divers articles proved the people to be in an improving condition. If he could believe in the confident predictions hazarded by Mr. Cobden and his friends, his objections even to the repeal of the Corn Laws would be greatly weakened, but he thought that the advantages to be expected from repeal were greatly exaggerated; and he firmly believed that, establish what system of Corn Laws you please, you must expect to find such differences in this country, and in a state of society like this—you must expect to find the extremes of wealth and poverty; they existed in every country on the face of the earth; and, indeed, the more civilization and refinement increase, the greater seemed the tendency of those extremes. If the Corn Laws were repealed, very little way would be made towards the cure of such evils. Sir Robert wished to reconcile the gradual approach towards sound principles, with a full and cautious consideration of the relations that had been established, and the interests that had grown up under a different system; and he maintained, that his recent commercial alterations constituted such pro-

gress, both with respect to the Corn Laws, and the importation of foreign products.

"I must claim a right to continue the application of that principle. I am bound to say, that the experience of the past, with respect to those articles on which high duties have been removed, confirms the impression founded on the general principle. But, sir, with the strong opinion I entertain, that in the application of this principle, it is necessary to excrcise the utmost caution for the purpose of insuring its general acceptance and stability, I cannot consent to give my vote for a proposition that implies the total disregard of such considerations, in the application of the principle of Free Trade."

On a division there appearedd, for the motion 122, against it 254, giving a majority of 132 for the maintenance of the Corn Laws. This was, however, a proof of progress ; for the Protectionist majority was less by 74 than it had been in the prceeding year, and by 181 than it had been in 1841. But the debate was more important than the division ; the chiefs of the cabinet disclaimed the principles of the Protectionists, and declared their doctrine unworthy even of refutation, whilc they asserted the doctrines of Free Trade as pointedly and as emphatically as Mr. Villiers and his supporters. The League, when mentioned, was spoken off with respect even by its most vehement opponents ; Mr. Stafford O'Brien, a leader of the Protectionists, paid a warm tribute of approbation to the display of ingenuity, industry, and patriotism at the recnt Anti-Corn-Law Bazaar in Covent Garden.

A sign of the times still more menacing to the Corn Laws was the number of meetings held by agricultural labourers in various parts of England, but more especially where the most rooted hatred to thcsc laws was evinced by the very class for whose special benefit they were said to be enacted

and maintained. No history of the period would be complete without a notice of these strange scenes ; we shall describe one respecting which we had peculiar opportunities of obtaining the most accurate information.

The meeting was held at Upavon, a populous village in the fertile "Bourne," a district purely agricultural, and where, if anywhere, the farm-labourers might be expected to be in favour of that "protection" which so many land-owners and farmers declared to have been devised for their especial benefit. But even here, "protection," such as was afforded by the Corn Laws, proved to be sadly at a discount, and hundreds of men, spite of the threats of the farmers, their masters, to discharge them if they attended the meeting, wended their way to it after a hard day's toil, to discuss their grievances and to make them known to the public. Upwards of 1000 persons, chiefly consisting of agricultural labourers, some of them accompanied by their wives and elder children, were present, and formed an imposing and interesting scene, assembled, as they were, under a fine old tree on the green. The meeting was conducted in the most orderly manner, and the deepest interest in the proceedings was exhibited by all present.

The chairman and the speakers all belonged to the class of farm-labourers, and they described their grievances with a natural eloquence which was clearly the result of thorough conviction united to plain common sense. David Keele, the chairman, declared that the labourers after a hard day's work could earn no better subsistence than potatoes and salt, and his hearers responded, "We don't get half enough of that." His illustration of the coercion used by the Protectionists to stifle the complaints of the labourers, was equally clever and characteristic :

" Our opponents, in my part of the country, serve the people like as the carters used to do the ploughboys when I was a boy. They would give the boys the whip, and threaten

that they would give it them again if they told their parents; and so it went on from day to day. The case is the same with the labourers. Your masters say, if you come forward to tell your case, you shall be turned out of employment, and thus they keep you in fear; and you will never be better as long as you are kept down in this way. But if you come forward boldly and tell your case, you cannot make it worse. ('That's true.') If the ploughboy had told his father of the carter, the carter would have been punished, and that is what he was afraid of. You are prevented coming forward by the arbitrary conduct of your opponents, but fear not their frowns: they are in the hands of the Lord, and can only go so far as he permits. Always remember, however, that, whatever law is issued by the legislature, we are bound to obey; whoever resists the powers that be, resists the ordinance of God. It is the arbitrary Corn Law that has done all the mischief, and we believe Free Trade will be beneficial to ourselves and families."

Mr. Westell dwelt with great force on the injury which the Corn Laws inflicted on the farmers, by affording an excuse for the exaction of oppressive rents, and thus forcing tenants to stint the wages of labour. Abundant proof was given of the utter inadequacy of the wages of the farm-labourers to procure sufficient sustenance, to say nothing of comforts. One man with five and another with eight children declared that their earnings were only seven shillings per week. The examples given of "the short and simple annals of the poor" were equally graphic and affecting:—

"The children," said Ozias Lealey, "would jump across the house if they saw a couple of potatoes, and quarrel which should have them. It was enough to drive a man mad. When he came home at night, and found them crying for food, and he had none to give them, it almost drove him mad; he could not stand it another winter. What would the

gentlemen think of this, filled as they were with their roast beef and sherry wine; when the poor man was happy in heaven, he knew not where the rich would be." [Several people exclaimed that every one with a family was in the same state, and many others would have come forward to speak, but were kept back by fear.]

At the conclusion of the meeting, three cheers were given for the League, and three for the repeal of the Corn Laws. These were significant facts: they showed that, where the labourers were allowed to think and act for themselves, the artificial scarcity superinduced by restrictive laws was as indignantly denounced, because it was as severely felt by them as by other classes of the community.

Still more striking was the progress of Free-Trade opinion in the mercantile and manufacturing classes. The Council of the League had asked for a fund of £100,000; the contributions, including the profits of the bazaar, amounted to £116,000; and preparations were made to raise a still larger fund, while offers of increased subscriptions came in from every side. The qualification-movement for winning the counties had exceeded the warmest expectations of those by whom it was devised; majorities had been secured in several of the most important counties, and many others were sure to be won by the same means, should the struggle be much longer protracted. Above all, there was a wide-spread conviction through the country that the leading members of the cabinet, Sir James Graham and Sir Robert Peel, were thoroughly convinced that the system of protection could no longer be maintained, and that they only waited some favourable opportunity for its abolition. This opinion was not only secretly entertained, but openly expressed; it was proclaimed in the following terms, by Mr. John Bright, at one of the League meetings in the theatre of Covent Garden:—

"Sir Robert Peel knows well enough what is wanted.

He says that good harvests and his measures, inasmuch as they are Free-Trade measures, have brought the country from the depths of suffering to its present state of comfort and prosperity. He knows our principles, and what would result from the practice, just as well as we know. He has not been for nearly forty years in public life—hearing everything, reading everything, and seeing almost everything—without having come to a conclusion, that in this country of 27,000,000 of people, and with an increase of 1,500,000 since he came into power in 1841, that a law that shuts out the supply of food which the world would give to this population cannot be maintained ; and that, were his government ten times as strong as it is, it must yield before the imperious and irresistible necessity which is every day gaining upon it. *From his recent speech I would argue that he intends to repeal the Corn Laws. He cannot say what he does, and mean ever to go back to the old foolish policy of protection.* Sir Robert Peel came from the very county where the League had its origin ; and his fortune was made out of those little delicate fibres of cotton which are destined yet to revolutionize and change the face of things in this country. He sprung from commerce ; and, until he has proved it himself, I will never believe that there is any man—much less will I believe that he is the man—who would go down to his grave, having had the power to deliver that commerce, and yet not having the manliness, honesty, and courage to do it. His position gives him enormous power. No minister in this country ever had a greater power than he has ; and where there is enormous power, there must always be a corresponding responsibility. Sir James Graham said, that he felt the fearfulness of the responsibility of being a party to the restriction of the food of a great and populous country like this ; and there can be no doubt that both he and Sir Robert Peel do feel, and that very sensibly, that, if they should let the opportunity pass by, they

may be involved in a degree of blame from which their countrymen and posterity will never extricate them. There is no escape from the claim we make ; it is so plain, simple, obvious, and just, that whatever men be in power, or whatever party have a majority, this claim will come session after session upon them, every time with increased force on our part and feebleness on theirs, until the great principle for which we contend be fully recognized ; and it will soon be recognized, if we may judge from the events which have taken place in this country within the last two months in connection with this question ; and from this meeting which I see here to-night, and from the incessant agitation which is going on in every county of the country, I see as plain as if written up before me, that the doom of this infamous system of monopoly is sealed. We have it from Divine inspiration, ‘that the earth is the Lord’s and the fulness thereof’ ; and we know that the merchants and the traffickers—the merchant-princes of this metropolis—have recognized the truth of that saying, for they have inscribed it on the front of their new and magnificent Exchange. If that be true, and there be on the part of the Creator a beneficent regard for all His people, there can be no doubt whatever that a blessing from heaven will attend the labours of those who are honestly and conscientiously engaged in carrying out this great work. We ask simply that the people of this country shall be free to work, free to earn, free to live, and free to enjoy. This League was formed to obtain that object ; from year to year it has gone on increasing in power ; and now, when the opinion in our favour is spread in every portion of the country, and is being responded to from every part of the world—on your behalf, and in the name of every Leaguer in this kingdom, I can state here that this organization will never be dissolved so long as the Corn Law exists.”

Similar opinions were expressed on the same occasion by

Mr. Fox, with unrivalled felicity of illustration and powers of eloquence. He said,—

“ There is a scene in Serjeant Talfourd’s play of ‘The Athenian Captive,’ in which the vanquished hero, made a slave, has first to take off his helmet, and so to deposit his buckler, then to give up his sword, and then to sink into his servile condition. Now, in this way Sir Robert Peel is serving the Corn Law. He takes national independence—‘that is your buckler—put that down;’ ‘class interest—that is the plume in your helmet—lower that;’ ‘the effect on wages, and the agricultural classes—that is your sword—give that up.’ He strips off one thing after another, but with this difference—the Athenian captive was stripped of his appendages that he might be made a slave ; Sir Robert Peel strips monopoly of all its powers and appendages, in order that the country may rise to the condition of commercial freedom. He leaves but one plea for the laws which he so stoutly defended —one and only one : and that is, as he replied after the honourable member for Wolverhampton, that ‘protection law is 150 years old.’ So old a law might have been a little wiser. Well, this hoary-headed sinner that has been made by Sir Robert Peel to confess to all sorts of iniquities : to having been an inveterate sophist ; to having played off all sorts of humbug upon the nation, in order to gratify his private interest ; having been the occasion of distress and suffering ; and, if we look from his admission to the facts, we may accumulate on his head yet more and heavier crimes. It has stimulated guilt ; it has plundered the honest, the poor, and the industrious ; it has entrapped children, and bred them up in theft and fraud, and made them its victims, and has even been accessory to murder, and sent one after another to the grave : in fact, it has done as much iniquity on a broad scale, as Fagan, the Jew, is described by Mr. Dickens, in ‘Oliver Twist,’ as having conducted on a small

seale. Now, the very same defenee is set up for it. ‘The law has lived 150 years,’ says Sir Robert Peel. What said Fagan in eourt? ‘I am an old man!’ The appeal did not avail him in his guilt. The seene is told by Diekens in one of those expressive passages which go to every imagination and heart, realizing at once to us the eunning of the man as well as his criminality, and the feeling also of others, in a way whieh may well rank amongst the masterpieces of that fietitious writing—the only great fiction which is founded upon truth—the truth of human nature, and whieh he has thus deseribed in the work to which I refer :—“‘Guilty!’ says the jury; and the building rang with a tremendous shout, and another, and another, and then it echoed deep and loud groans, that gathered strength as they swelled out like angry thunder. It was a peal of joy from the populace outside, greeting the news that he should die on Monday. The noise subsided, and he was asked if he had anything to say why sentence of death should not be passed on him. He resumed his listening attitude, and looked intently at the questioner while the demand was made; but it was twice repeated before he seemed to hear it, and then he only muttered that he was ‘an old man, an old man—a very old man;’ and so dropping into a whisper, he was silent again.” Age did not save him, nor shall it save the Corn Laws; his day of doom arrived, and so shall theirs; and louder shouts than Diekens has deseribed shall ring the peal of its condemnation, and hail with iterated joyousness the fact, that at last there shall come its blaek Monday for this old blaek monopoly. This is not the place in which politieal matters or politieal eharaeters not necessarily involved in our own peculiar topies are to be dis-  
eussed. I, therefore, go not into my opinion of the career of Sir Robert Peel, or of the many reasons that would present themselves to my mind why I might prefer that the country reeeived this great retribution from other hands than his.

But there are some reasons why it would be better that he—why it would be better that he than any other man whatsoever—should at last grant this great measure and become its author, and that, after having in various ways gradually led forward the adoption of Free-Trade principles in the various bearings of our commercial legislation, he should at length crown the whole with this ; and the commercial blood in his veins run the more rapidly as he lived to see how much good could be accomplished in the nation, and what a bright scene of peace, joy, and prosperity would follow from the complete carrying out of this principle ; and in that learn a moral lesson to be taught him in no other way : for all my animosity towards Sir Robert Peel would be gratified, and the worst vengeance I may wish inflicted on him would be this—that in the contemplation of the blessings of Free Trade to the country by him conferred, he might read how much better is one single simple act of right, than a whole life of parliamentary tactics and political expediency.”

Finally, on the last night of the session, Lord John Russell took the same view of public affairs. After reviewing what had been done since the assembling of parliament, he proceeded to say,—

“ In the present year there is far less security for the maintenance of the Corn Laws than there has been in any previous year. We had a confession from the Secretary of State for the Home Department that the sliding scale by itself would cause considerable evils, and that it was necessary to prop it up by a fixed duty levied upon some part of the corn that would come in ; and that the corn from Canada might be obtained under a fixed duty in May, June, or July, when the corn from the Continent was kept back waiting for a diminution of the duty ; therefore it was necessary to have a Canadian Corn act in order to make the sliding scale bearable by this country. Now, this is a confession of the

total imperfection of the sliding scale; this is a confession that the sliding scale by itself would not answer its purpose, and that you are obliged to prop it up by the Canada Corn act, which has proved a bugbear to the farmers of this country, which was not calculated to do much good, and perhaps did as much harm by the panic it created as it did good by the sound principles on which it was framed. The right honourable gentleman, the First Lord of the Treasury, took away another argument for the sliding scale; that whereas the advocates of protection have always relied on this, that the labouring classes would be losers by the admission of foreign corn, because when bread was cheap, the wages of labour would be very much diminished. The right honourable gentleman declared his belief that such would not be the case, and that the low price of bread and provisions was an advantage to the labouring classes. That which he thus stated to be his belief was proved in detail by the right honourable gentleman who sits near him, who showed that during the years of cheap corn you had not only had more comforts and better wages for the labouring classes, but you had in consequence less crime and less immorality. Why then, I say, the ease of the present Corn Law is greatly weakened by these admissions; but let us look to the foundation on which it has now to rest. Can any one have heard what has been passing within the last ten days, without feeling the misery of an uncertain law for the import of corn? Can anybody feel that there is a doubt whether the next fortnight will bring us a tolerably good harvest or one miserably deficient, and not wish that the labouring classes of this country should be provided with food from all quarters from which it can be obtained? I maintain that it is the duty of this House to provide for such a contingency; but what is it you do? I admit that whether you have a small fixed duty or a completely Free Trade in corn, it must always be matter of

deep anxiety whether the harvest should turn out to be favourable or unfavourable; that if there were now at this present moment a completely Free Trade in corn, and you were in doubt whether the harvest would turn out an abundant or a very short one, it would be impossible there should not be a considerable amount of speculation, it would be impossible there should not be a rise in the price of corn and fluctuation to a considerable extent dangerous with respect to the currency as well as the sustenance and welfare of the people. That I admit; but then that is a consequence for which the legislature would not be responsible. I maintain, if you had either a fixed duty or a Free Trade, you would be sure of such supplies as could be obtained coming in. I think a fixed duty in such a case would only diminish the price at which the merchant abroad would sell the corn. But at all events, according to such a system, your legislation would be fixed. There would be no doubt a contingency as to the duty at which the corn would be admitted; but as the matter at present stands, there being the uncertainty of the seasons, there being the uncertainty of foreign supplies, you superadd by your legislative wisdom the artificial uncertainty whether ten weeks hence the duty will be twenty shillings or one. You thereby double the amount of speculation, you double the hazard to which the people of this country are exposed, you double the gambling in this article of necessary sustenance for human life. Then, sir, is it wise to continue such a law? is it wise for a ministry who profess Free Trade, for a prime minister who makes it his boast that he has done more for Free Trade than any other minister for a very long period of years? is it wise for him to rest upon a law which he must own to be so defective, with respect not only to all the principles of political economy, but all the other principles on which commercial transactions are usually based? And then, to add to this uncertainty, we have gentlemen

avowing that they do not think the law will be permanent. We had only the other day a gentleman, who has been always a constant supporter not only of the present ministry, but especially of their policy as to the Corn Law and the sliding scale, avowing publicly that he did not think this law would last, and that two years would probably see the end of it. Why, when people hear that language used by a supporter of the government—not one of those ultra-agriculturists who might in a moment of discontent say that he did not believe the minister would support the Corn Laws, but one of their steady supporters—what can the farmers think but that it is settled that this law shall be abandoned? Well then, I say, if it is to be abandoned, do not leave us in this miserable uncertainty. Begin your next session soon, begin it early, and begin it with a reconsideration of the Corn Laws. The farmers themselves must feel, even if they desire to have a large protection against the admission of foreign corn, and to have high prices kept up, that it is anything but desirable to have to treat with a landlord on the supposition that there is to be such a law, and then to find two years afterwards that there is to be no such system, and that the whole is to be swept away. However such a system may suit the political interests of the parties, it can never suit the interests of the farmers. They cannot but wish to have it altered; and I am quite satisfied the most enlightened of them would much rather even see any evils that might fall on the country by the sudden adoption of the measure proposed by my honourable friend behind me, the honourable member for Wolverhampton, rather than be kept in this state of uncertainty, having doctrines preached to them that go to the destruction of the present system of Corn Laws, and yet have the Corn Law kept up until some period they know not when, at which they are told it is to be finally abolished. I contend therefore that while you have done much to make an approach

to a system of a Free Trade; still on the great articles of consumption, timber, sugar, and above all, corn, you are keeping up restrictions contrary to every sound principle, and which it is impossible, if your own theories are sound, that you can mean to uphold. At this very moment, with respect to corn, the stock of supply in this country is unusually small; I shall move therefore, for an account of the quantity that is now in bond; it is unusually small in consequence of your own law. And let it not be forgotten, when gentlemen refer, as I have seen them sometimes do with great satisfaction, to the failure of speculations in the foreign corn-trade, that the consequences of a failure in those speculations are very often injurious, not only to those immediately engaged in them, but to the whole country, manufacturers, commercial men, and agriculturists; that the indisposition to get together a supply, to gather a store of corn on which the government can rely in case of a sudden failure of the harvest, is a national misfortune; and a thing that tends to make the trade gambling and uncertain, is a loss to the agricultural interest as well as to all others, and that no law based upon such principles can be for the present or permanent advantage of the country."

The noble lord was answered in the following fashion by Sir James Graham:—

"I will not now, on almost the last day of the session, revive all the debates which have taken place with respect to those three particular articles to which I am referring. I must however observe with reference to the article of timber, that although the arrangement made might not be that which the noble lord considers the best, yet, compared with the arrangement which existed when her Majesty's present government came into office, it cannot be disputed that it is a great improvement. The duty on colonial timber has been altogether remitted, and the duty on Baltic timber has

been greatly reduced ; and the prieses are materially lowered. It is open to argument that the diseriminating duty between the colonial and the Baltic timber, although the duty on the latter has been redueed, is nevertheless considerable ; but still the fact can not be disputed, that the consumption of Baltic timber is greatly increased. With respect to sugar, I must say that here again the measure of the government has been favourable to the consumer. You may dispute our poliey, and say politieally it is erroneous, and that morally it is deceptive, but still I will contend that practieally the effect has been greatly in favour of the great body of the people. The antieipation of the government was, that the effect of their measure relating to sugar would be to increase the con- sumption of that artiele by the amount of forty tons in the year, or twenty per cent on the then amount of consumption. They have had only the experience of six months, and I believe I am accurate in stating that the increased consump- tion, so far from being limited to twenty tons for the half- year, has closely approached to thirty tons. Then, with respect to the priece. The government stated that their object was to seecure to the humble consumer a large diminu- tion of the price of sugar. What has been the result ? I rejoice to say that our most sanguine expectations have been more than realized, and that a reduection has taken place of not less than a penny-halfpenny in the pound. I will now turn for one moment to the topic of corn. I agree with the noble lord, that an ample supply of food is a subjeet of para- mount importanee ; I cannot, however, but imagine that the noble lord has been alarmed by some dew or mist hanging over the Surrey hills some ten days ago, when he first gave notice of this motion. I cannot help ascribing the present motion very much to this very particular topic to which the noble lord adverted at the close of his speeeli ; and to his being actuated by those unfavourable anticipations which I

entertain with respect to the approaching harvest. The noble lord has said that the country is in such a position as has created great anxiety—nay, almost an unparalleled anxiety. The House will allow me to say that at this moment there is bonded foreign corn in this country, consisting of wheat and barley, to the extent of 450,000 quarters; whereas in the year 1839, when the noble lord was responsible for the state of the country, what was the quantity of corn in bond? Why, only 51,000 quarters. Again, in 1839, on the 6th of August in that year, the capital in the Bank of England was only £2,430,000 in specie; whereas at the present moment he rejoiced to say there is a capital of £16,000,000 of specie in the Bank. Did the noble lord propose any alteration in the duty on corn at the end of the session of 1839? Did he in 1840? Did he in 1841? At all events, did the noble lord in 1839 bring forward any measure, as the responsible minister of the crown, feeling the danger of the small supply of corn in bond, and the small amount of specie in the coffers of the Bank. Did he at that time propose any alteration in the Corn Laws? So far from it, neither then nor in the succeeding session did he propose any measure at all upon the subject. The noble lord talks of our sliding scale, and describes the amount of protection it affords as being

‘Small by degrees, and beautifully less.’

But have we not heard of another scheme of protection to which the same line of the poet may with equal propriety be applied? Have we not heard of an eight-shilling duty? and then of a six-shilling duty, or it may be even a four-shilling duty? till at last, in order to make the quotation of the noble lord most apt, he spoke of the possibility of its one day being a work of great difficulty in persuading gentlemen on the ministerial side of the House, and those who were responsible for the management of public affairs, that any protection whatever would be required. Now, neither I nor any of her

Majesty's government, have ever denied that by the evolution of time, and by the increasing population of this country, the difficulty of supplying that population with a greater quantity of food must not rapidly increase. Fortunately, however, circumstances at the present moment show, that under the existing law the supply of home-grown corn, arising from the improved state of agriculture, and the greater skill in the application of capital to the soil, has greatly increased within the last two or three years. At the present moment, even with the existing prospects of the country in regard to the forthcoming harvest, the prices have been kept low by the increased supply of home-grown corn and that which was in store, and which was a quantity far exceeding the expectations of those who were the most conversant with the subject. What are the prices at the present moment? The average of the last six weeks was 49s. 11d. per quarter; and the average price of this week is considerably under 54s. I agree with the noble lord that a bad harvest is the severest affliction that can befall a nation. No means can be devised so as to secure any country against that great evil; but I am not one of those who think it is an evil in the existing laws, that at a time when serious apprehensions are entertained that the harvest may be deficient, to allow the taking of corn out of bond, when done timely and with due precaution. At the present moment the stock in bond is accumulating; and considering the quantity that is now held, and the prospects at home with reference to the great breadth of wheat sown, I entertain a sanguine hope that no great decrease of supply as to the chief food of the community is to be apprehended. At all events, I do not think at this period of the session it is possible for the House gravely to sanction any alteration in a law which has been discussed repeatedly and at great length, and upon which the opinion of the House has been taken, and pronounced by a very large and decisive majority."

After a short speech from Mr. Moffatt, Mr. C. P. Villiers sharply criticised the statements of Sir James Graham, and depicted the probable results of a bad harvest in a tone of prophetic anticipation which subsequent events too truly realized. Perhaps there could not be found a more extraordinary instance of the skill of the statesman suggesting the foresight of the prophet, than Mr. Villiers' remarkable address. It may almost lead the reader to doubt whether he has before him the anticipations of a statesman in 1845, or the reminiscences of a politician in 1848. Having referred to the deplorable accounts of the state of the harvest in Kent, given by Mr. Plumptre, one of the members for that county, and a gentleman remarkable for very strong and peculiar views on religious subjects, Mr. C. P. Villiers thus continued :—

“ The honourable member for Kent should not think that when he refers to such matters as the subsistence of the people, that he is saying anything foreign to practical Christianity, or that he need apologize to the House for his allusion to the prospect of the harvest offered in the county of Kent. He will excuse me if I say, that to this House and to the country that part of his speech will have far greater interest than any reference to his peculiar religious views, and that when he will give the House information connected with this subject, procured from his county, he will always command the attention of the House. He has stated a very important fact to the House ; peculiarly so at this moment. He tell us that the wheat is very generally blighted in Kent, a fact worthy the notice of the right honourable Secretary of State (Sir James Graham), who seems at a loss to discover how anybody can feel anxious about the harvest. He wonders where the noble lord has been living ; and thinks it must be on the Surrey hills, where, enveloped in some maze, he has fancied that the harvest may be deficient. Why, I may

ask in return, I think, where the right honourable gentleman has been living, or what he has been reading of late. I should have thought that if he had communicated with any person in the street, or had read any of the ordinary organs of instruction, he might have explained the fears expressed by the noble lord; for I will venture to say that it is the universal topic of discussion at this moment in the country, that no two people meet without exchanging apprehensions on the subject, and that peculiar uneasiness is felt in consequence of the weather for the last few days; and why should he be surprised at this anxiety, when he repeats to-night what he has said before, that one of the greatest curses that could befall the people would be a bad harvest. By which he means that an insufficient supply of food in the present state of the country is one of the severest inflictions of Heaven. With those opinions of the right honourable gentleman, in which he probably differs from some of his friends, why should he not think it worthy of a thought, and why has he not met the grounds on which the noble lord rests his fears by some assurance that they were baseless? If the right honourable gentleman has no fear on this subject, he must have exclusive information. Why does he not communicate it? why does he not tell us that a bad harvest, with which we have been visited so frequently, will not recur? It is all-important, on account of that policy which places this country in the critical position of depending upon the hazards and accidents of a season in this small portion of the globe, and as this is the condition which at this time of the year we are always placed in, and as it is wholly unnecessary, it does become properly connected with any review of the proceedings of a session, to inquire if anything has been done to relieve the country from so precarious a dependence. The right honourable gentleman and the government seem to be perfectly alive to the evils now which follow from dearness and scarcity,

they are consequently alive to the blessings which attend the failure of the Corn Law. We are fresh from the experience of that law having failed in its purpose in raising price by limiting quantity; the right honourable gentleman has been clear and complete in this acknowledgement of the great blessing which has attended that failure. The right honourable gentleman has declared to this House, that since food has been cheap and abundant, he has to congratulate the country upon everything which he would most desire to see — the people contented, the country prosperous, and a great diminution of all those ills and evils, moral and social, incident to a densely-populated community, and which are extended so fearfully when the usual disturbance occurs which attends dearness and scarcity. He admits that this has followed upon a good harvest. Is it unreasonable to ask if he expects that we shall always be blessed with a good harvest? and if not, if he has taken any precaution to prevent a scarcity of supply, the result of a bad one? We are about then to separate with a perfect knowledge of the causes of past suffering and present prosperity, with a belief that the cause of prosperity is accidental, and with as perfect a conviction, I believe, that the present prosperity need not depend upon accident; that our impolitic meddling with the corn-trade is the occasion of all the doubt and danger that exists at this time. I have often complained at this season of the year of our separating without doing anything to place the trade in food upon a solid, regular footing, but never do I think it so entirely unreasonable to do so as I do this year. Never was the experience so complete, never was the opportunity so good of changing the law, never were the principles on which this law is rested more thoroughly discredited, never have measures based on the opposite principles been so completely successful. Circumstances and opinion alike call for the change, and it is fair matter of observation and reproach at

the end of the session, that nothing has been done towards it. I do not hesitate to say, that if all the measures that have been carried this session had been postponed, and the community provided with something like security for a constant, adequate supply of food, that more would have been effected for the future happiness and prosperity of the country. And I will go further and say, that if the evil of a bad harvest is to occur again, that nothing that has been done of a beneficial kind during the session will be felt or appreciated; I will apply that particularly to those great public works which we have been so assiduously engaged about this session. Why have we been engaged in them? Why do we hear of so many? Simply because the people are prosperous, because there is a large available surplus of capital, because the annual income of the country is larger this year than it has been for years past; *but the accomplishment of all these works depend upon the continuance of prosperity; and if anything should occur to disturb our credit, or disturb our economical arrangements in this country, which invariably follows when the harvest is bad, then I say nothing but loss and ruin and suffering will attend those who have embarked in them; and it is well worthy the notice of those who have contributed to those schemes, that there is no instance where the price of food has risen, caused by deficient supply, that such undertakings have not been among the first to feel it and to suffer from it.* In these works, to which we have been giving our sanction, we have been showing our faith and respect for the principle of competition. There is not a line of railway that has been proposed that might not be opposed on the same grounds that the proprietors of this country oppose competition in the market with their produce; and yet so little faith have we in monopoly when it does not touch a favoured interest, that let but any rival line show that the public can be served cheaper and better by competition, and legislative sanction is

instantly given to it. The proprietors of this country ask of this House to make them an exception to this principle, and we on this side ask why they should be excepted? How are they different from all other men? How have they shown that they ought to be trusted? Have they not frequently left the public deficient? have they proved that they have taken the best means that they should be properly supplied? Have they proved that those under them are happy and contented? or have they recommended their system by any one circumstance? They are, however, to be excepted. I then ask of the minister, with his views of the evils of deficient supply, what steps he has taken to prevent the recurrence of that calamity? We take the supply of food out of the natural operations of commerce. What do we substitute? The government supports their party in this exclusive privilege of supplying the people with food. Have they taken any security that they will do it adequately? Can they give the country any assurance that what has happened before will not recur? Do they know that everything which skilful husbandry can accomplish has been done; that they are by common consent dealing with their properties in the manner most likely to produce an abundant supply of food? And if they do not, how can they justify the system? The public are well supplied with everything where this meddling does not occur. The case which we make is, that the same would happen with regard to food, if commerce was allowed to be free. Our case is, that the merchants, manufacturers, the capitalists of this country, would prove at the bar of the House that they could by their united energies supply this community with food as cheaply and plentifully as it is possible be done. You trust them in everything else, you mistrust them here when you cannot succeed yourselves, and when it is all-important there should be success. I say that our course is more dangerous now to pursue than it has been

before, and one which cannot with safety be persevered in. In former times governments have defended vigorously this system of protection. They have deemed it essential, they have fostered every prejudice, confirmed every fallacy, and encouraged the ignorance by which it is maintained, and they have been consistent in their measures accordingly : but here they have done just the contrary ; they have left nothing undone to prove the hollowness of their principles of protection ; they have introduced competition in everything else, and have declared themselves favourable to the application of that principle in everything but food ; they have, in short, stripped the principle of protection of all its pretences of even indirect good, and leave it in full force where it is most severely tried, and where its failure is almost fatal to the people. Let it also be remembered, that when the disasters of a bad harvest recur, there will then be no mode of accounting for the ills it brings with it, by any of those idle fallacies which have appeased the people before. The people have been taught by experience how false and foolish are all the things put forth to divert their minds from the real cause of their misery before. It will be impossible to tell the people that it was over-production that deprived them of employment, or too much machinery, or an over-issue of money, or the cupidity of manufacturers, or the inability of exporting to foreign countries. We have seen that with the increase of all these things—more machinery than ever, more production than ever, more money than ever, more manufactures and more wealth accumulated ; that the working classes have had better wages, more employment, and are generally in a better condition than they have been before ; and that there is no way of accounting for it but by the restoration of our internal commerce and our usual consumption, and all the arrangements for production consequent upon the abundant harvests that we have had for two seasons past. I say then, that

when a period of distress recurred from deficient food, that the causes of this mischief will be obvious to the humblest man, and that therefore the responsibility will be fixed much more distinctly upon a few than it has been before—a poor consolation to those who suffer ! but it ought to be surely a matter of serious consideration for the political majorities of the two Houses of legislature, that to them the public will justly turn as the authors of their calamity, in persisting in a course of which they have been so frequently forewarned and counselled against. I know no persons who would have to share that responsibility with them but the electors of those great towns who, holding the franchise in trust for the non-electors, have preferred pandering to the objects of the rich, instead of protecting the poor and powerless ; and they will and must upon any occasion of confusion be bitterly reproached for their breach of trust if they have returned members to parliament for the purpose of impeding commerce and restricting the supply of the people's food.”

Mr. Milner Gibson followed, pointing out the great uncertainties of the coming harvest, and the consequent peril to all the great interests of the country. He was answered by Mr. Darby, one of the members for Sussex, who astounded the House by declaring that “*There was no danger, for the glass had been rising during the last twenty-four hours.*” The shouts of laughter with which this grave piece of intelligence was received, effectually put an end to the debate, so that, in fact, the session may be said to have closed with a declaration that the existence of the Corn Laws depended on the fluctuations of the barometer.

The battle of Free Trade had been fought, and it was virtually won. Hostile majorities had, in fact, contributed to its success ; for they had stimulated the middle classes to such exertion that there was no mistaking the public opinion of the country. It was evident to all men, and to none more

than the ministers themselves that the first food-panic or monetary convulsion would enforce a total and immediate repeal of the Corn Laws, under circumstances which would render the benefit least appreciable, and the perturbation of interests most injurious. We must, however, in the next chapter record some of the other events of this memorable session before we examine the causes which precipitated Free Trade.

## CHAPTER IX.

INCREASED PERPLEXITIES OF THE PEEL ADMINISTRATION—  
DESCRIPTION OF THE CONSERVATIVE PARTY—DIFFICULTIES  
OF THE COUNTRY.

MR. PITT's plan of Union between Great Britain and Ireland has not yet been completed ; it included not merely the fusion of the two parliaments into one imperial legislature, but also the complete emancipation of the Catholics, the payment of their clergy by the state, and a suitable provision for the education of the pastors of the people. Owing to the prejudices of George III., emancipation was delayed for nearly thirty years, and was then granted under circumstances which took away all grace from the boon ; the payment of the Catholic clergy has not yet been attempted, and up to the year 1845, the provision for the education of candidates for the Catholic priesthood was miserably inadequate. Before entering into the history of the great controversy raised through the empire on the propriety of increasing the grant to the College of Maynooth, it may be desirable to say a few words on the general subject of education in Ireland, and its relations to the wants and condition of that country.

It is an anomaly that Trinity College is co-extensive with the Dublin University. The foundation of at least a second college was contemplated by the Stuarts, and was sanctioned by an act of the Irish legislature. When it was resolved to found a College at Maynooth, in order to save candidates for the Catholic priesthood in Ireland from the necessity of seeking an education on the Continent, where they were

likely to imbibe sentiments hostile to British connection, two other plans were proposed to the government, either of which would have been preferable to that which was ultimately adopted. It was proposed to increase the number of fellows and scholars in Trinity College, to throw these offices open to free competition between Protestants and Catholics, and to superadd a faculty of Catholic theology for the instruction of candidates for the priesthood in the Latin Church. To this it was objected, that Trinity College had been founded principally for the education of ministers of the Established Church, and that the proposed change involved too great a departure from the purposes of its institution. It was then recommended to found a second college, open to students of every religious persuasion, but in which there should be a special provision for the education of candidates for the priesthood. But the adoption of this plan would have involved the necessity of re-constructing the University, and depriving Trinity College of its exclusive privilege of conferring degrees.

The University question still remains one of the perplexing difficulties of Ireland; Trinity College as a university is open to persons of every religious denomination, while as a college all its offices and emoluments are confined to members of the Established Church; but as a University it takes cognizance only of the literary attainments gained in its single College, so that any Catholic or Presbyterian who seeks any of its advantages as a University must submit to all its disadvantages as a College. It is perfectly open in one capacity; it is rigidly exclusive in another: such an anomalous position cannot long be maintained; either the University must be separated from the College, or the College must abandon the exclusiveness long since resigned by the University.

This question would long since have been brought to an issue, if Mr. Pitt's plan of securing a state-support to the Catholic clergy had been adopted at the commencement of

the century. The priests would then have occupied a social rank and position to which University degrees would have given sanction, and on which University honours would have conferred exaltation. But, when the priests were left dependent on the precarious contributions of the people, it was not likely that any of them would seek from graduation a titular position which their means would be inadequate to support.

It has been often said that the foundation of Maynooth was a blunder ; and yet no one has ever ventured to suggest what should have been substituted in its place. Its anomalous position can now be remedied only by separating the University from Trinity College, and affording its students the opportunities of taking degrees on terms of equality with those of the older College. But in the present condition of Irish parties it would be a matter of exceeding difficulty to construct such a governing body for a National University, as would satisfy the hostile interests and hostile parties which distract Ireland.

By proposing a large increase of the grant made for the support of Maynooth, the Conservative leaders distinctly enunciated their adoption of a new policy with regard to Ireland ;—they distinctly repudiated the claim of the Protestants of Ireland to “aseendaney,”—and they recognized the principle of an impartial regard on the part of the state to all classes of religionists. Hardly ever was a measure introduced which excited more stir and controversy in the public mind. None was more earnestly or perseveringly debated in the legislature ; the discussion on the second reading occupied no less than three evenings in the Upper, and six in the Lower House of Parliament. The interest which it excited among the community at large was shown by the numerous public meetings which were held to oppose it ; and by the almost unprecedented number of petitions,

chiefly in opposition, sent on the subject to parliament. It was adopted as a test of opinion at almost every election which happened to take place. None were more fiercely opposed to it than the Protestant Nonconformists, partly from the apprehension and alarm with which they viewed the progress of Roman Catholic doctrines, and partly from their apprehension that it would lead to the payment of the priests, and thus extend and strengthen the principles of State endowment, which all the Nonconformist denominations were united to oppose. The ministry on the other hand were supported by the whole Roman Catholic body, and by the main portion of the Whigs and Radicals, who hailed in this bill the recognition of their own avowed principle of the religious equality of all members of the social community.

Sir Robert Peel brought the subject before the House on the 3rd of April, and read a memorial from the Roman Catholic prelates of Ireland to the Lord-Lieutenant of Ireland, stating the utter inadequacy of the grant of nine thousand pounds to support the expenses of the educational establishments at Maynooth. He then continued :—

“ Now I ask whether I am not right in stating to the House, that you can take no course which is not preferable to a continuance of this state of things ; that is, to a continued violation of principle—if it be a violation of principle—in undertaking to instruct a priesthood from whose doctrines you dissent, and yet at the same time making only this niggardly and inadequate provision for the maintenance of those for whose education you have made yourself responsible ? Is it wise—when this subject is brought under our consideration, and must decide upon it—would it be a proper course, to say to the Roman Catholics of Ireland,—‘ We are bound, it is true, by an inconvenient obligation, contracted by our ancestors, and that obligation we will respect ; in a surly spirit, we will continue to give you the £9,000 a year ;

but there will be no improvement in your buildings, there will be no advance in the salaries of your professors ; the acts of parliament shall continue ; our implied sanction and encouragement, so far as statute-law is concerned, shall remain, but we tell you we vote the £9,000, feeling that our conscience is violated, and we give it you only because we have to fulfil a contract into which others entered, and from which we cannot escape ?' I say *any* course is preferable to this."

He came to the second alternative : " Shall we avow that our conscientious scruples are so violated in the maintenance of this system, that we will discontinue the connection with Maynooth ? that the vote shall, after some temporary arrangements, be discontinued, and the burden of educating the priesthood shall be thrown upon the people of Ireland ? I infer that there are some who think *that* a desirable course. Before you adopt this course, I ask the House to listen to the statement I am about to make of the reasons which prevent me from counselling it. When did your connection with the institution arise ; under whose authority, and how long has it continued ? The connection began in 1795, when George the Third was king, Mr. Pitt the minister, and the Duke of Portland (afterwards Chancellor of Oxford University) Home-Secretary ; in that year—a critical period—the Lord-Lieutenant, Earl Fitzwilliam, adjuring the Irish parliament by their attachment to religion, learning, and civilization, recommended to their consideration the improvement of education. The intent of those general terms was pointed out by Mr. Grattan ; who stated that on this subject (education) it is intended that a plan should be submitted for colleges for the education of the Catholic clergy, who are now excluded from the Continent. Earl Fitzwilliam's immediate successor as lord-lieutenant, the Marquis Camden, laid the first stone of Maynooth College ; and afterwards, at



WILLIAM WENTWORTH FITZWILLIAM, EARL FITZWILLIAM

Wentworth Fitzwilliam







Painted by J. Hoppner, Esq. R.A.

Engraved by G. Adcock

JOHN JEFFRIES PRATT, MARQUIS

*Carolean*

K. G.

the close of the session of 1795, the Marquis thus addressed the parliament:—‘ My lords and gentlemen: His Majesty observes, with the highest satisfaction, that during the present crisis you have not failed to cherish and maintain the various sources of internal prosperity. You have also completed the intention so benevolently entertained of entirely relieving the poorer classes from the tax of hearth-money. A wise foundation has been laid for educating at home the Roman Catholic clergy.’” After the Union with Ireland, Sir Robert Peel continued to state,—“The grants to Maynooth were continued by the imperial parliament. Nay, at two subsequent period—in 1807, when Mr. Percival was minister, and in 1813, it was increased. After this sanction, continued for fifty years, was the House now to say that they had been all along violating a conscientious scruple, and that the connection must cease. When it was formed, the Roman Catholics were labouring under disabilities; that did not constitute, in the view of the Irish parliament, an objection to originating this grant. Those disabilities had been now entirely removed; the Irish Roman Catholics were placed upon the same footing with ourselves in respect to civil privileges: should we now, in opposition to the acts of our predecessors, say to them,—‘ That favour which was granted to you under the administration of Mr. Pitt, must now be withheld from you on account of a conscientious scruple?’

“ Sir, I should deprecate the effect of such a step. It is not the amount of the pecuniary grant; what I deprecate is the animus it would indicate. We should never be able to convince those from whom the grant was withheld, that those scruples which were not felt by George the Third, by Mr. Pitt, by the exclusively Protestant legislature of their own country, are now felt to such a degree by us, that we must abandon the connection which was thus formed.” Sir Robert

Peel then proceeded to contend against the assumed principle that any religious obligation is violated by giving support to the spiritual instruction of those from whose tenets we dissent, whether in the case of a Protestant landlord, whose tenantry are Roman Catholic, in the case of corporations, like the great city-companies, holding large estates in Ireland, or in the case of a country like England, possessing colonies in which various forms of religious faith and doctrines are professed. If the proposed grant were condemned on principle, he asked the House if they were prepared to repeal the acts for appointing Roman Catholic chaplains to prisons and workhouses? There remains but one other course," continued Sir Robert, "and that is the course which we are prepared to take. Yes, I will avow it, that we are prepared, in a liberal sense and confiding spirit, to improve that institution, and to elevate the tone of education there. Will you not take that course? I think you will agree with me that such is the course which should be taken; that if we are seriously to consider this institution, we ought to consider it with a view to extensive improvement. By improvement I mean improvement of means only, not an interference with the course of education, poisoning all the good that you might derive from liberality. I mean really, that we should treat that institution in a generous spirit, in the hope that we shall be met in a spirit corresponding with ours; and that we shall reap the fruits of the improvement of that educational establishment." He then explained the proposal which, on the part of government, he was instructed to make. The trustees of Maynooth College could purchase land to the extent of £1,000 a year; but they could not receive it on any other terms than for the lives of the trustees; he proposed to incorporate the trustees by the title of "the Trustees of Maynooth College," and to enable them to hold real property to the extent of £3,000 per annum, should members

of the Roman Catholic faith be desirous to contribute to the college so incorporated. "The stipend of each individual professor does not exceed £122 per annum. Instead of defining exactly what shall be the amount paid to each professor, we propose to allot to the trustees of Maynooth College a certain sum which shall be placed at their discretion for the payment of salaries. That sum will admit of a payment of £600 or £700 per annum to the president of the college ; of £260 or £270 to the professors of theology ; and of £220 or £230 to the other professors. We propose, therefore, that a sum not exceeding £6,000 shall be allotted to the trustees for making provision for the officers of the institution. There are at present about 430 students in the college, divided into three classes—the twenty Dumboyne students, the three senior classes, and the four junior classes. We propose to allot to each of the Dumboyne students the sum of £40 per annum ; we propose to make provision on the whole for 500 free students ; that there shall be 250 students in the four junior classes, and 250 in the three senior classes, these being divinity students. We propose that for the maintenance of each student, to cover the expense of his commons, attendance, and other charges, consequent upon academic education, a sum shall be placed at the disposal of the trustees, calculated on an average of £28 per annum for each student. We propose that to each of the students in the three senior classes, the sum of £20 per annum for their own personal expenses shall be allowed separately.

"The total sum required for the students will be £14,560; the total sum for the establishment £26,360. We propose that the college shall be made, in appearance and in fact, worthy of an institution of the kind. We propose that proper provision shall be made, for the accommodation of the president and professors ; and we propose to limit the amount

of money for putting the college into repair, and to take a vote, of course not an annual one, of £30,000.

" We propose that a sum of money, so sanctioned by parliament, shall be applied for the purposes I have described. We do not propose provision for more than 500 students; there shall be no power of increasing the number to 600 or 700 by reducing the individual allowances. We wish to put the establishment on a liberal footing, that the reminiscences of Maynooth may no longer be revolting. It is, therefore, that I propose to limit the number of students to 500. We propose also, that the Board of Works shall undertake the repairs of the College, as they do of the other public buildings, in order that they may be conducted with the greatest economy. We do not propose to make provision in the act for the annual expenses of the repairs, but that they shall be the subject of an annual vote, and be included in the annual estimates for the Board of Works as in other cases. Instead of the present *ex officio* visitors—the Lord Chancellor and the judges—it is proposed that the crown shall appoint five visitors to exercise the same visitatorial powers as the present visitors; but instead of visiting once in three years, to do so once a year, and as often as the Lord-Lieutenant may direct. These visitors would not interfere with any matters relating to the doctrine and discipline of the Church of Rome; but for those subjects three more visitors would be elected by the other five, as at present, to be members of the Roman Catholic Church. The three elected visitors now are—the Earl of Fingall, Dr. Crolly (R. C. Archbishop of Armagh), and Dr. Murray (R. C. Archbishop of Dublin)." Such was the outline of the measure. It had not been the subject of any stipulation with the authorities of the Roman Catholic Church, but the ministers had intimated their intentions to those dignitaries, and they had reason to believe that they were satisfied and

grateful for the measure, and would cordially recommend its acceptance to their community. Sir Robert concluded his speech, by moving for leave to bring in a bill, saying in conclusion :—“ We do not think that there is any violation scruples involved on our proposition. We believe that it is perfectly compatible to hold steadfast the profession of our faith without wavering, and at the same time to improve the education and to elevate the character of those who—do what you will—pass this measure or refuse it—must be the spiritual guides and religious instructors of millions of your fellow-countrymen.”

Sir R. H. Inglis led the opposition, declaring that “ ministers were endowing the Church of Rome almost in the same proportion in which they withdrew support from the Protestant institutions of the country,” and he concluded by declaring that “ although shattered and torn, the flag of Protestantism still remained at the mast-head, and that he and his friends would fight for it as unfalteringly as when in better days it waved unbent and untorn over the empire.”

Several Conservative members expressed similar sentiments and determination, but none more strongly than Mr. Plumptre, who avowed, as the basis of his opposition, his belief that the Roman Catholic religion was idolatrous. Mr. T. Duncombe was the only Liberal who opposed the measure : he resisted it on the ground of hostility to all religions supported out of the public revenues. Among the Conservative supporters of the measure were Lords Francis Egerton and Sandon (since Earls of Ellesmere and Harrowby), and Mr. J. S. Wortley. Several Irish members gratefully supported the proposition, which they declared would lead to a progressive improvement of the Irish priesthood. One of the most remarkable speeches in favour of the measure was made by Lord John Russell ; in the course of it he said,—“ The arguments which are so sound, and, as I think, incontro-

vertible, to induce this House to found an endowment for the education of the Roman Catholic priesthood, will prove, upon another occasion, as sound and as incontrovertible with respect to an endowment for the maintenance of that priesthood. For my own part, preferring most strongly, and more and more by reflection, a religious establishment to what is called the voluntary principle, I am anxious to see the spiritual and religious instruction of the majority of the people of Ireland endowed, and maintained by a provision furnished by the state."

On a division, the motion for leave to bring in the bill was carried by a majority of 102; the members being 216 for, and 104 against. Decisive as such a majority seemed to be, it did not at all diminish the zeal or lessen the activity of the opponents of the measure. Petitions were got up; meetings held, and deputations sent from all parts of the country; the cry was, not that "the Church," but that "Protestantism itself was in danger;" and even in 1829, Sir Robert Peel had not to encounter so great a storm of religious, or rather sectarian, excitement.

When the second reading was moved on the 11th of April, Mr. Colquhoun denounced the measure as unnecessary and injurious. Mr. Grogan declared that Maynooth was so conducted as to be undeserving of public support. To the surprise of all the world, Mr. Gladstone, in spite of his recent resignation, warmly advocated the measure. Lord Arundel and Surrey, in the name of the English Catholics, thanked government for their liberality. After which Mr. Disraeli delivered a most amusing speech, consisting chiefly of caustic reflections and bitter sarcasms upon the personal conduct and policy of Sir Robert Peel:

"The right honourable baronet has said in his speech, that there were three courses open to him. In a certain sense, and looking to his own position, he is right there:

there is the course the right honourable gentleman has left; there is the course the right honourable gentleman is following; and there is usually the course which the right honourable gentleman ought to pursue. Perhaps, sir, I ought to say, that there is a fourth course; because it is possible for the House of Commons to adopt one of those courses indicated by the right honourable gentleman, and then, having voted for it, to rescind it. That is the fourth course, and in future I trust the right honourable gentleman will not forget it.” Mr. Disraeli then proceeded to complain of the course pursued by Sir Robert Peel towards his supporters. He said, that if an independent member criticized the conduct of ministers, his mouth was stopped by saying that he ‘bandied personalities.’ “I remember when we used to toast ‘another place’ with three times three, and nine times nine; ‘another place’ was once a favourite toast at all Conservative dinners—where is the independence of ‘another place’ now? It is not Radicalism—it is not the revolutionary spirit of the nineteenth century which has consigned ‘another place’ to its illustrious insignificance; it is Conservatism, and a Conservative dictator. Are you prepared to meet the same fate? Every time a member expresses any opinions not absolutely agreeable to the minister of the day, is he to be stopped by a charge of ‘bandying personalities?’ Whenever the young men of England allude to any great principles of political life or parliamentary conduct, are they to be recommended to go to a railway committee? Such a system may break the spirit in ‘another place,’ and it may lower the tone in this; ‘another place’ may be drilled into a guard-room, and the House of Commons may be degraded into a vestry. There is now no longer any constitutional opposition, because there is no government formed on definite principles. Something has risen up in this country as fatal in the political world as if

has been in the landed world of Ireland—we have a great parliamentary ‘middleman.’ It is well known what a middleman is: he is a man who bamboozles one party and plunders the other, till having obtained a position to which he is not entitled, he cries out, ‘Let us have no party questions, but fixity of tenure.’”

Mr. Roebuck severely censured Mr. Disraeli’s introduction of petty and private personalities into the debate, attributing his conduct to mortified ambition and disappointment at finding his merits overlooked by the ministry. Mr. Fox Maule, who was regarded as the representative of the Presbyterians of Scotland, strongly opposed the motion, declaring that the increased grant was odious to the united feelings and sentiments of the Protestants of the empire. In reference to a petition sent from the Remonstrant synod of Ulster, in favour of the measure to which Sir Robert Peel had referred, he said, “it would have been the height of ingratitude if such a petition had not been presented: it proceeds from the parties who are to benefit by the Dissenters’ Chapels bill of the last year, a bill in favour of which the Irish Roman Catholics had petitioned very numerously.” This allusion, however, told strongly in favour of the measure, and secured the votes of several members, belonging to the dissenting body, in its favour.

Mr. Stafford O’Brien strenuously opposed the grant as a virtual breach of the faith which the Conservative members of the House had pledged themselves to their constituents at the last election. On this point he was, of course, impregnable, for no circumstance had contributed more to the overthrow of the Melbourne ministry, than the calumnies so studiously circulated, that they were willing to connive at the increase of the power of “Popery,” and had formed some undefinable plot for the overthrow of the Protestant ascendancy, if not the Protestant religion.

Mr. Macaulay advocated the measure with extraordinary eloquence; referring to the opposition made to it by the representatives of the English Universities, he said—"When I consider with what magnificence religion and science are surrounded at these places—when I remember the long streets of palaces, those venerable cloisters, those trim gardens, and those chapels with their organs and altar-pieces and stained windows—when I remember their schools and libraries and museums and galleries of art—and when I remember, too, all the solid comforts provided in those places both for instructors and pupils—when I remember the stately dwellings of the principals, and the commodious apartments of the fellows and scholars—when I remember that the very sizers and servitors lodge far better than you propose to lodge those priests who are to train the whole people of Ireland—when I remember the bowling-greens, and the stabling, and the combination-rooms, the display of plate on the tables, the excellent cheer on feast-days, and the oceans of excellent ale in the buttery—and when I remember, too, from whom all this splendour and plenty were derived—when I remember the faith of Edward the Third, of Henry the Sixth, of Margaret of Anjou, of William de Wykelham, of Archbishop Chicheley, and of Cardinal Wolsey—and when I remember what we have taken from the Roman Catholic religion—when I remember King's College, New College, Christ Church, and my own Trinity—I look at the miserable 'Do-the-boys Hall' which we give in return, and I blush for the Protestant religion."

After some observations on the absurdity of supposing that any increase of the grant involved a new violation of principle, he directed attention to the arguments of those who opposed the measure because it had been brought forward by men who ought to have been precluded by a regard for consistency from proposing any such grant:

"Undoubtedly," said Mr. Macaulay, "it is of the highest

importance that we should pass good laws ; but also it is of the highest importance, that public men should have, and appear to have, some great fixed principles by which they should be guided, both when holding office, and when in opposition. It is most desirable it should not appear that a mere change in situation produces a change of opinion. I have no feeling of personal hostility ; and I trust that the political hostility I shall avow by no means precludes me from admitting that the right honourable baronet at the head of the government has many of the qualifications of an excellent minister—great talents for debate, for the management of this House, and for the transaction of public business—great industry and knowledge ; and I doubt not he is sincere in his wishes to promote the interest of the country. But it is not, at the same time, easy for me with truth to deny that there is too much ground for the reproaches of those who, in spite of bitter experience, have a second time trusted, a second time raised him to power, and now find themselves a second time deceived. It is not easy for me to deny that it has been too much the practice of the right honourable baronet to use, when in opposition, passions with which he had no sympathy, and prejudices which he could not but regard with the most profound contempt. Then, when in power, it is seen that a change—a change salutary indeed for the country—takes place in the right honourable baronet : the instruments he before used are thrown aside—the ladder by which he rose is struck away.”

Mr. Macaulay went on to reproach the government in strong terms for their language and conduct when in opposition, charging them with having fomented the passions and religious prejudices of those whom they knew to be in the wrong :

“The day of reckoning has come ; and now, and upon that bench, you must pay for the disingenuous conduct of

years. If that be not so, then clear your public fame before the House and the country? show some clear and intelligible principle with respect to Irish affairs, that has guided you both when in office and in opposition? Show us how, if you are honest now in 1845, you were honest in 1841? Explain to us why, when out of place, you stung Ireland into madness, in order to gain with you the prejudices of England; and now, when in power, you light up England in a flame, in order to ingratiate yourselves with Ireland? Let us hear some argument, to show that if now, as ministers, you are right—you were not the most factious and unprincipled opposition that ever sat in this place?

"The mischief of this spectacle of inconsistency would be increased, if a similar display were made on the opposition side of the house. If I admitted that this bill would produce evils, even those evils would be doubled, if it were to be rejected by the Whigs, and we should then have before us one vast shipwreck of all the public character in this kingdom. Therefore it is—making sacrifices not agreeable to any man to make, curbing and confining many feelings that are strong within me—I am determined to give the bill my most determined support; and to give my support to every bill emanating from the government that shall tend to make Great Britain and Ireland fully and completely a united kingdom. I give that support regardless of the obloquy that may be poured upon me, and regardless of the risk I well know I run of my seat in parliament. Obloquy I will meet. As to my seat in parliament, I will never hold it by an ignominious tenure; and I am sure I could never lose it in a more honourable cause."

This stinging speech produced a deep impression on the House, not a little increased by the feeling manner in which Lord Lincoln, who supported the motion, alluded to the painful position in which he was placed by advocating a

measure so thoroughly distasteful to his father, the Duke of Newcastle. Some other members having given their opinions, Lord Ashley opposed the proposal, but so feebly that he might have passed as its advocate; and Mr. Smythe supported it, but with such caustic remarks on its proposers, that he was more formidable than a declared opponent. Advertising to the mutability of Sir Robert Peel's political career, he said,—“In all the contrasts which the right honourable gentleman's career affords, there is none with which history will deal so leniently as the contrast between Mr. Secretary Peel, and Sir Robert Peel the Prime-Minister—between the young, hot, proscribing partisan, and the beneficent ruler—between the Octavius of intolerance, merged in the Augustus of conciliation.”—Colonel Sibthorp laid hold of this contrast, and stated it in his own peculiar style :

“Really I should have doubted, had I not known it, whether the right honourable gentleman at the head of the government is a Romanist, a Protestant, or a Mohammedan. I say so—I repeat it. Such is the opinion I have formed; and the day I am sure will arrive when we shall hear, nay, when we shall see, that right honourable baronet sitting cross-legged in his proper character of a Mohammedan;—and also—some time or other—perhaps before—perhaps afterward—embracing his holiness the Pope with the greatest affection and regard. I confess I have lost all confidence in that man. But there is yet something to look for—yes, there is hope; I can see their days are numbered.” The Colonel concluded, with a zealous profession of his personal adherence and devotion to the cause of Protestantism.

Sir James Graham took the opportunity afforded by the debate to retract the incautious expression which had given so much and such just offence in Ireland, that “Concession had reached its utmost limits.” This unfortunate phrase had done more to increase the unpopularity of the Peel

ministry in Ireland than anything else connected with their administration, and it was now one of the greatest difficulties with which they had to contend, in persuading their partisans to depart from a principle so deliberately avowed, and enter more largely than ever on the path of conciliation. Sir James Graham evaded, rather than met the difficulty: "I do not think it," he said, "quite fair to fasten upon a particular expression used by any member in the course of a debate, especially when an explanation has been offered, and that explanation I hold in my hand, which was offered within a fortnight from the use of the expression itself. But I will do more; I will not only admit that expression, but I will avow also my regret at having used it. I say that when the feelings and interests of a nation are concerned, even an inadvertence of a minister of state becomes a serious matter. I therefore now make this reparation fully and freely—I am sorry that I used the expression: if I have given offence to Ireland, I deeply regret it; and I can only say from the depth of my heart, that my actions have been better than my words."

This honest retraction of an unfortunate phrase, to which a far more extended significance had been given than its author had designed, met with a less generous response from the liberal members of England and of Ireland, than it really merited. Mr. Sheil, indeed, accorded full justice to Sir James Graham, declaring the retraction more honourable than the declaration had been offensive; but the phrase was too valuable an addition to the stock-in-trade of those who traffic in disaffection, to be easily laid aside; and even now, some years after it has been disavowed and withdrawn, we find it quoted as a specimen of the feelings entertained towards Ireland by English statesmen. How strange a proof it is of the influence of phrases, that the cry for Repeal in Ireland has derived infinitely more strength from the

unfortunate expressions of Lord Lyndhurst and Sir James Graham, than from all the orations of O'Connell and Smith O'Brien put together !

Mr. Ferrand opposed the bill, in a speech which had little bearing on the immediate question, but was most injurious to the character of Sir Robert Peel's immediate supporters. He read the declarations of attachment to the Protestant religion, which they had made to their constituents at the late election, and declared that, after such a violation of faith by public men, the nation ought to appeal to the crown to dissolve parliament. Messrs. Crawford, Duncombe, and Munitz, on the Liberal side, opposed the measure as sanctioning the principle of state-endowments. The grant was supported by Mr. Sheil, who hailed, with gratitnde, Sir James Graham's retraetation of his former ungracious language ; and by Mr. Cobden, who viewed the measure as a valuable extension of the principle of National Education. Lord John Russell reiterated the sentiments to which he had given utterance in the debate on the first reading. In reply to him, Sir Robert H. Inglis called attention to the singular fact, that every supporter of the measure had advocated it, not as valuable in itself, but as valuable in being the pre-eursor of other similar measures. He then warned the House of the danger of endowing the Roman Catholic Church in opposition to the wishes and feelings of the Protestant people of England and Scotland. Finally, the protracted debate was concluded by Sir Robert Peel, who acknowledged the honourable and independent conduct, with which that debate had been rife, among both the supporters and opponents of the measure, on both sides of the House. Whatever feelings might have affected him in the course of the debate, all were merged in the one feeling of deep earnestness, that the House would not consent to the rejection of the bill. The House might think, and perhaps not unjustly, that it

would have been better that this measure should have proceeded from the constant and strenuous friends of the Roman Catholics: if so, let it withdraw its confidence—punish the men; but let it not disregard the consequences of rejecting this measure after it had been introduced. He had been warned that if we were to appeal to his own constituency, limited and friendly as it was, he would lose his seat; be it so, but could anything induce ministers, watchful of events in Ireland, to run such a risk, but a sense of public duty? He recapitulated the motives which had actuated them, much as Sir James Graham had done; succinctly repeated the reasons which he gave on proposing the present bill; and pointed out the bearing that this measure for the education of priests had upon the Charitable Requests act, which facilitated the voluntary endowment of the Roman Catholic Church by members of its own body.

To illustrate the happy feeling already excited in Ireland, he read from a letter, signed by sixteen out of seventeen professors at Maynooth (one being incapacitated by illness), this declaration :—"The undersigned beg leave respectfully to express our deep sense of gratitude for the very liberal provision which you, as the head of the government, have proposed for the education of the Roman Catholic clergy, and still more for the kind and gracious manner in which you have recommended the measure to the friendly consideration of the House."

He then answered Sir R. Inglis's question :—"This proposal is brought forward simply and exclusively on its own abstract merits. This proposal is not part of a preconcerted scheme; it is not brought forward with a design of facilitating the endowment of the Roman Catholic clergy by the State. We have had no communication on the subject of endowment with any authorities in Ireland or elsewhere; we have nothing on that subject in our

contemp'ation. Reports, that we have had some secret communication with higher powers at Rome, are altogether without foundation. I entertain the strongest conviction, that we can do no good in Ireland by secret and unavowed negotiation with Rome, to which the Roman Catholic Church in Ircland is not a party." He had no reason to believe that the Catholic body in Ireland were disposed to depart from their late declaration against an endowment; he saw great difficulties in it, especially in the recent demonstration of public feeling in England: "But," he said, "I will not hamper any future government by a declaration, now that the difficulties are altogether insuperable. . . . I cannot say that I think there is a decided religious objection to such a measure." He could not see how those who object to it could get over the difficulty of reconciling their argument with the support of the Roman Catholic Church in Canada and the Colonies, especially in Malta. Dissenters, too, were compelled to pay church-rates, though it was said that it was a violation of conscience to support a chureh from which one individually dissents:—"If it violates my conscience to contribute towards the support of the Protestant Dissenters in Ulster, it equally violates the conscience of those Protestant Dissenters to contribute to the support of the Established Chureh." Referring to Mr. Macaulay's attack, Sir Robert Peel said, that he should abstain from reeriminations, though that gentleman was the last person who should have thrown out imputations of that sort. "But," he continued, "I freely own that every feeling with regard to imputations of inconsistency, every feeling with regard to the security of the government, is subordinate to one—do not reject this measure. As I said before—punish us, visit us with censure; let the two partics ecombine, upon the ground that this policy ought to be carried out by those who were its original projectors; take what course you please; do not

let your indignation fall upon the measure ; let it be confined to those who have proposed it. We have been responsible for the peace of Ireland—you must, in some way or other, break up that formidable confederacy which exists against the British Government and British connection. I do not believe you can break it up by force ; I believe you can do much by acting in a spirit of kindness, forbearance, and generosity. There rises in the far western horizon, a cloud, small indeed, but threatening future storms. Ministers were lately called upon to declare that they were prepared and determined to maintain the rights of this country : I own to you, that when I was called upon to make that declaration, I did recollect with satisfaction and consolation, that the day before I had sent a message of peace to Ireland."

He deprecated war with earnestness ; but should it come, he prayed that every pulse throughout the frame of the empire, might be found beating in harmonious union ; Ireland ranged firmly on one side. He then alluded to another contingency :—“ God forbid that this state of general peace should be disturbed ! If it be, I doubt whether, considering what is now transpiring, the vindication of its honour and interests will not be committed *to other hands* ; but to whomsoever it be committed, *I shall take my place beside them*, encouraging them by every support which I can give in a just and honourable cause.”

On a division, the second reading was carried by a majority of 147 ; the members being 323 for, and 176 against the proposed increase of the grant to Maynooth.

Never was there a more singular debate, or a more singular division. Night after night expectant orators sat patiently through the livelong hours, in the anxious hope that they might be lucky enough to catch the Speaker’s eye. The sounds indicative of the close of one speech were eagerly waited and watched for ; and the gesture which marked

sitting down was the signal for twenty or thirty hats to wave in twenty or thirty hands, and twenty or thirty voices to shout out, “Mr. Speaker!” The orators lost almost all sense of that politeness which characterizes gentlemen, in their nervous anxiety to outleap one another. The dexterity, too, with which members tried to eclipse one another was most amusing—the tall men overtopping their neighbours, the short ones projecting forward. Men spoke, who seemed never to have spoken before, whose oratory, as yet unknown to fame, had been inspired by the Maynooth question. Not seldom, also, had speeches been rudely interrupted in the very middle by the loud calls of rival claimants for the “attention of the House.” A man busily engaged in arranging his own thoughts might be excused for not paying attention to the words of another; and might therefore have no other clew to the conclusion of a speech than the cessation of voice. Yet there were many speeches of which it was difficult to say which was the middle and which was the end; when a man paused, whether to gather breath, or to recollect an argument, or to look at a note, one could not tell whether he was half done or whole done; and this inartistic treatment deceived even the wary eye of the Speaker himself. For so soon as a pause occurred in a member’s speech, there was immediately a flock of jumpers, like leaping fish on a sunny day; and the Speaker, deceived into the notion that he who was addressing him was done, singled out another from the crowd, and named him. But his time was not yet come; the other had still to finish. All this, however, was taken very good-humouredly; cheers and laughter covering over the amusing interruptions.

But where, it might have been asked, were now the ministerial and the opposition sides of the House? Not on the right, not on the left, of the Speaker’s chair. There are individuals who have a passion for betting; and they cultivate their

equivocal art with so much assiduity as to be able to decide, almost with precision, on the particular spot on which a fly in movement will alight. They would have been puzzled in the House of Commons during the Maynooth debate. No man but a man's own self could tell which way he was going to vote; and no man could tell with what companions he would be associated when it came to a division. Each side, for and against the Maynooth Bill, was a Noah's ark. On one side were the highest churchmen with the most decided advocates of the voluntary system, the stanchest Tories and the truest Liberals. On the other side were found Liberals as true with Tories as trimming; Whigs faithful to their old principles, and considerate Conservatives, who came round, or had always been of the same way of thinking. How varied, too, were the arguments on both sides of the question! One voted because the question involved a great principle; another, because, no principle at all was involved. The bill was, indeed, a puzzle and a perplexer to the House, whether it was advocated on expediency, or necessity, or justice, or principle; whether it would probably overturn the church, or save the church; destroy Protestantism, or propagate it; confirm the Irish Roman Catholics in their faith, or allure them to the reformed; endow Popery, or ultimately subvert it; bring the Pope into amicable relations with England, or lead him to think that by-and-by England may be made over to him in perpetual fee. All these consequences had been deduced; and on the same side, and on both sides. Marvellous, too, was the scene which found Mr. Bright in reluctant but necessary association with Sir R. Inglis; which dissociated Lord Ashley and Lord John Manners; which threw Sir Robert Peel and Sir James Graham on Lord John Russell and Mr. Macaulay; and separated Mr. Fox Maule and Mr. P. M. Stewart from their party. The Tories were split; the Conservatives were split; the Ministerialists

were split; the Whigs were split; the Free-Traders even were split; the House of Commons was split. Such a fusion and confusion of parties probably was never exhibited in the whole history of the British parliament.

In the House of Lords the most distinguished advocate of the measure was the Archbishop of Dublin. His speech was one of the most powerful expositions of principle ever delivered in parliament, and we are enabled to make some extracts from a more correct report than has been hitherto accessible to the public. One of the most common arguments against the measure was thus candidly stated and completely answered by the most reverend prelate:—

“ Many persons—misled perhaps by the use of the word ‘grant’—have spoken as if the funds allotted to Maynooth seminary came from the property of Protestants, as such, instead of being, as is the fact, part of the property of the nation. And they have been deceived on the anomaly of a *Protestant nation* assigning funds for the education of Roman Catholic priests; as if either justice or common sense could allow us to reckon more than six millions of our Roman Catholic fellow-subjects as *no part of the nation*; and as if they were to be necessarily and for ever precluded, as a matter of imperative and sacred duty, from even putting forward any claim to a portion of that national property which consists of the contributions, through taxation, of persons of all classes, and of all religious persuasions.

“ The distinction I have been noticing is so evident and so strongly marked, that even if a man of known liberality and munificent bounty, when asked to contribute towards the building or endowment of a Roman Catholic chapel, or college, should decline, through a religious scruple, as conscientiously objecting to the Romish doctrine and worship, his scruple—be it right or wrong—would not at all interfere with his advocating a grant of the public money for tho-

same purpose. I mean, that he would not be at all inconsistent, should he advocate and support such a grant; because in this latter case, there is not, properly speaking, any question about *giving*, the money not being *his* to give, but the property of the community; a part, not of any *Protestant* fund, but of that to which all the subjects of the empire contribute. And there are few persons, I apprehend, who would deliberately, and when not under the excitement of passion, maintain that whatever class of men may at any time obtain a majority in the legislature, are justified—although it is on this supposition that most of the arguments of those opposed to the measure rest—in legislating entirely for that class, disregarding altogether the claims of the rest of the nation.

"The advisableness, indeed, of this or that appropriation of public money—the reasonableness of each particular claim that may be urged—these are matters open to discussion: but to confound together two things so distinct as a gift from one individual, or one state, to another, and an assignment of some portion of national property to persons who are a portion of the very nation which owns that property—this can only lead to confusion of thought, and erroneous views of the subject."

In reference to the censure and scorn bestowed on ministers for having considered and compared the consequences of the three courses open to them: viz., continuing the grant in its inadequate amount—adequately increasing it—or withdrawing it altogether—his grace said:

"I wish that the censure and scorn which rest on such grounds were more frequently merited. I wish, that is, that it were more generally the practice than it is, to take into account in each case all the alternatives that present themselves, and to consider the reasons for and against each; instead of at once deciding, as is too common a practice,

against any measure that may appear in itself objectionable, in cases where, perhaps, there is nothing but a choice of evils before us ;—as when the throwing, for example, of a valuable cargo into the sea is the only mode left of saving the ship. In truth, it is on the course of human affairs, and not on the legislator who adapts his procedure to them, that such censure and complaint really falls. How often, for instance, does it happen that in conducting an army, or any other kind of expedition, through an untried and difficult country, the leader will have to deliberate upon the threefold alternative of either continuing to advance, or stopping short in his present position, or turning back and retracing his steps. And in that case, or in the present one, which is analogous to it, that man would not surely deserve the praise of superior wisdom who should at once resolve against one proposal to which he saw objections, without weighing against them those which might lie against the others. And yet a very great majority of the objectors to the measure, seem never to have even had the thought occur to them, what other course ought to be taken, and what consequences would be likely to ensue.”

The party usually called Puseyites in the Church of England, and many of the Evangelical party, had appealed to the bishops to oppose the grant on the ground that their support of it would be contrary to the vows which they had made at their ordination. To these insidious objections, Archbishop Whately replied :—

“ One out of the many ‘idle words’ which have been recklessly thrown out, on the present and on many similar occasions, I think it right to notice, because it implies so utter and so noxious a misconception of the whole character, both of the Christian religion generally, and of our own church in particular. The solemn vow by which we are bound to ‘banish and drive out all erroneous and strange

doctrines, contrary to God's word,' has been again and again brought forward on this and on several other analogous occasions; and it has been either distinctly asserted, or by implication insinuated, that any one who has taken that vow, cannot, without a violation of it, support such a measure as the one lately passed. For there are some, I am sorry to say, among the loudest censurers of *Romish* claims to infallibility, who yet have such full confidence in *their own* infallibility, as to make no scruple of imputing breach of a vow to any one who does not interpret that vow in the same sense with themselves. And since such imputations are, I suppose, listened to by some persons, (as may be inferred from their being on so many occasions, and so pertinaciously urged) I feel bound to protest against them, in behalf not only of myself, but also of many of my brother clergy, who think with me on these points, and among whom are to be found some of the most truly pious and able and unostentatiously zealous and useful Christian ministers.

"I am not, I trust, more forgetful of the vows I have made than those whose interpretation of them is utterly at variance with mine. But, from their interpretation would follow consequences, from which not only I, but probably most of themselves also, would recoil. We have vowed not merely not to promote and encourage, but to '*banish and drive out* erroneous doctrines.' This vow therefore cannot, at any rate, be fulfilled by simply voting against a pecuniary grant. We are *actively* to '*drive out* doctrines contrary to God's word.' But whence are we to drive them out? and by *what means*? Is it by penal laws—by secular coercion—by the point of the bayonet—that we are to drive out religious error? And again, is it from these islands—from the *soil of the British empire*—that we are bound to banish false doctrines? This can only be effectually done by banishing the professors of them; as Ferdinand and Isabella expelled

from Spain the Moors and Jews. And are these the measures which Christian bishops and other clergy are bound to recommend, and the legislature to adopt?

"We have heard of late much complaint of the unscriptural and immoral, and indeed seditious and dangerous doctrines taught at Roman Catholic seminaries; and we have been called upon, on that ground, by virtue of our vows, to vote against an *increased grant* to such seminaries! Manifestly, if the statements be admitted and the reasoning assented to, we must not stop there. All allowances to Roman Catholic chaplains of regiments, jails, and work-houses must be stopped; as well as the grants and endowments enjoyed by Roman Catholic ministers in the colonies and dependencies. Nor can we consistently stop at the withdrawing of all grants to Roman Catholic seminaries: we must call for the *total suppression* of the seminaries. Nor will even this be enough: we must go on to prohibit the teaching, in any way, or in any place, at home or abroad, of the obnoxious doctrines; in short, we must urge the total suppression of the Roman Catholic religion, by the forcible expulsion of all its adherents.

"If such were the vow proposed to me, sooner than fulfil or undertake so unchristian an engagement, I would resign my office—I would abandon my profession—I would abjure the church that imposed such vows. But I have always considered the vows I have taken as binding me—or rather as *reminding* me of the duty—to drive out, as far as lies in me, erroneous doctrines from *my own church*, and especially from that portion of it committed to my own immediate superintendence."

Not the least impressive or valuable part of this remarkable speech was his grace's answer to the absurd clamour raised against expediency:

"So great is the outcry which it has been the fashion

among some persons for several years past to raise against *expediency*, that the very word has become almost an ill-omened sound. It seems to be thought by many a sufficient ground of condemnation of any legislator to say that he is guided by views of expediency. And some seem even to be ashamed of acknowledging that they are, in any degree, so guided. I, for one, however, am content to submit to the imputation of being a votary of expediency. And what is more, I do not see what right any one who is not so has to sit in parliament, or to take any part in public affairs. Any one who may choose to acknowledge that the measures he opposes are expedient, or that those he recommends are inexpedient, ought manifestly to have no seat in a deliberative assembly, which is constituted for the express and sole purpose of considering what measures are *conducive to the public good*;—in other words, ‘expedient.’ I say, the ‘*public good*,’ because, of course, by ‘expediency’ we mean, not that which may benefit some individual, or some party or class of men, at the expense of the public, but what conduces to the good of the nation. Now this, it is evident, is the very object for which deliberative assemblies are constituted. And so far is this from being regarded, by our church at least, as something at variance with religious duty, that we have a prayer specially appointed to be offered up during the sitting of the houses of parliament, that their consultations may be ‘directed and prospered for the *safety, honour, and welfare* of our sovereign and her dominions.’ Now, if this be not the very definition of political expediency, let any one say what is.

“But some persons are so much at variance with the doctrine of our church on this point,—and, I may add, with all sound moralists,—as to speak of expediency as something that is, or may be, at variance with duty. If any one really holds that it can ever be expedient to violate the injunctions

of duty—that he who does so is not sacrificing a greater good to a less, (which all would admit to be inexpedient)—that it can be really advantageous to do what is morally wrong—and will come forward and acknowledge this to be his belief, I have only to protest, for my own part, with the deepest abhorrence, against what I conceive to be so profligate a principle. It shocks all the notions of morality that I have been accustomed from childhood to entertain, to speak of expediency being possibly or conceivably opposed to rectitude.

“There are indeed many questions of expediency in which morality has no concern, one way or the other. In what way, for example, a husbandman should cultivate his field, or in what branch of trade a merchant should invest his capital, are questions of expediency in which there is usually no moral right or wrong on either side. But where there *is* moral right and wrong, it can never be expedient to choose the wrong. If the husbandman or the merchant should seek to gain increased profits by defrauding his neighbour, this would be at variance with expediency, because it would be sacrificing a greater good to a less. ‘For what would it profit a man if he should gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?’

“I believe, however, that the greater part of those who raise a clamour against expediency, mean, in reality, an *apparent*, but false and delusive expediency;—that which is *represented* as expedient, but in truth is not so. But if this be their meaning, it would surely be better, with a view to cutting short empty declamation, and understanding clearly whatever matter is under discussion, that they should express, distinctly, and according to the ordinary use of language, what they do mean. It would be thought absurd for a man to declaim against ‘virtue,’ and then at length to explain that what he meant was not *real* virtue, but an hypocritical

semblance of it; or to argue against the use of ‘coin,’ meaning all the time, not real genuine coin, but fraudulent counterfeits. And surely it is not at all more reasonable for any one to declaim against ‘expediency,’ if what he means be, not what is really expedient, but what is erroneously mistaken for it.”

Another most important passage, every way worthy of the Christian and the statesman, must not be omitted :

“ Another objection against the measure, which has been strongly and repeatedly urged, is, that all attempts at conciliation—all benefits of every kind—are received by the Irish Roman Catholics with indignant scorn, and repaid with ingratitude and hatred. And the proofs of this that have been adduced, consisted, in great part, of numerous extracts from the speeches and publications of the most prominent *agitators*;—of advocates for the repeal of the Union;—of those who have most laboured to foster a spirit of hostile jealousy between Irish and English—between Protestant and Roman Catholic. Their censure or disparagement of such measures as the establishment of the new ‘Board of Bequests,’ and the increased grant to Maynooth, are represented as proof that these measures are unacceptable to the Irish nation, and unlikely to produce any beneficial results.

“ To me, the *opposite* inference would seem the more reasonable. It would be strange, indeed, if any measure tending to peace, union, and contentment, were hailed with joy by those whose very trade is agitation. The greater the clamour raised against it by those who are confessedly occupied in promoting disunion and disaffection, the stronger is the presumption in its favour. It would be a strange way, indeed, of seeking to pacify Ireland, if we should condemn every measure that does not find favour in the eyes of those who are avowedly adverse to its pacification. To expect to tranquillize and benefit the country by gratifying its agitators,

would be like the practice of our superstitious ancestors with their sympathetic powders and ointments, who, instead of applying medicaments to the *wound*, contented themselves with *salving the sword* which had inflicted it !

"But let not the clamours of turbulent agitators, *on either side*, be at once assumed to be the voice of the nation. Such men will, of course, always call themselves 'the nation.' Those who are disposed cordially to welcome whatever measure of justice, and whatever benefit they obtain, do not usually assemble in noisy meetings, and indulge in vehement declamations. It is generally agitators that resort to such means ; but it does not follow that these are to be regarded as 'the nation,' or that the others are either few or insignificant.

"Burke compared those who, in his day, considered certain noisy demagogues and their followers as representatives of a disaffected nation, to men who should regard a parcel of grasshoppers chirping loudly on a sunny bank, as the *inhabitants of the field*, while the herds of cattle were quietly and silently ruminating beneath the shade. And we should be guilty of a like mistake, if we should assume that, in this or in any other country, the voice which is raised with the loudest clamour is necessarily the voice of the people.

"I must say I have never seen any sufficient proof that the great body of the Irish nation are incapable of being conciliated by any measures of justice or of kindness, when they have good reason to believe that these are the result of *equitable principles*, and of a *friendly* feeling, and not concessions made to intimidation. But were it otherwise—were we convineed that no reasonable concessions would be likely to produce, for the present at least, any corresponding result, —still, it would be for us not to be 'overcome of evil, but to 'overcome evil with good,' and to do to others, not what we expect they would do to us, but what we 'would have them

do to us.' The task allotted to us, in this, and in other human transactions, is not to *obtain* men's gratitude and good-will, but to deserve it."

This splendid piece of reasoning decided the fate of the measure; the reply which the Bishop of Exeter made was so singularly weak and inconclusive, that it only tended to strengthen the effect of the archbishop's address. Nor was it less efficacious out-of-doors; the measure, after all the opposition which it had encountered in its progress, was received with acquiescence when it passed; and of the varied classes by whom it was resisted, none but the most vehement advocates of the voluntary system in religion would now desire its repeal.

On the 9th of May, Sir James Graham developed the ministerial plan for establishing provincial colleges for the education of youth, without any distinction regarding their religion. It was opposed by Sir Robert H. Inglis as "a gigantic scheme of godless education;" and the same cry was raised against the plan by the more violent leaders of the Roman Catholics in Ireland. Archbishop Mac Hale published the most bitter invectives against the colleges, and denounced them as an insidious scheme for depriving the Roman Catholic hierarchy of all control over the education of their flocks. The bill for establishing these colleges was, however, carried with little opposition in both Houses; but the propriety of their establishment is still the theme of fierce controversy in Ireland.

So far as professional education is concerned, there was no deficiency of means in Ireland, but rather the reverse; Trinity College already supplies more candidates for holy orders than there are churches, more lawyers than there are clients, and more physicians than there are patients. It is for want of professional employment, that so many of the educated young men of Ireland are induced to engage in

the perilous trade of political agitation. Should the new colleges increase the number of unemployed professional men, they will become a public nuisance. On the other hand, there is no country under heaven where there is less provision made for instruction in any of the branches of industrial education. With the single exception of the Engineering Institute recently added to Trinity College, Dublin, there is not a single school in which any of the practical applications of science are taught. There is no school for teaching navigation in the sea-ports; no superior school of agriculture in the country; no provision made anywhere for training the future merchant, the future tradesman, the future farmer, or the future navigator. The new colleges may be so worked as to supply these deficiencies; they may become valuable Polytechnic schools; but the very name of colleges is likely to suggest the adoption of a course of instruction more suited to the professional than the mercantile and industrial classes.

Mr. Sheil made a vigorous effort to have Trinity College thrown as open to Roman Catholics as the university with which it is identified. Mr. Bernal Osborne proposed an address to the Crown, praying for an inquiry into the revenues and constitution of Trinity College. Mr. Sheil, in supporting this motion, adduced many individual cases of hardship, produced by the exclusion of Roman Catholics from fellowships and scholarships in Dublin.

"So long," continued Mr. Sheil, "as you keep up Trinity College in its supremacy, you will make your measure of academical education, for all political purposes, a complete failure. Your provincial academies will be marked with all the characteristics of mediocrity, which will only render the elevation of Trinity College more conspicuous by the inferiority with which it will be surrounded. How stunted and dwarfed the groves of our new academies, when compared

with the rich luxuriance of the gardens of Trinity! I had a thousand times rather you had applied your £18,000 a year to the establishment of new fellowships and new professorships in the metropolitan and national institutions; because if you had so done, Englishmen would have got a value—a value in peace, a value in contentment, a value in pacificatory results—for their money. Now, your measure for political purposes—I say for political purposes, though I won't deny that the advantages of education will be distributed to a certain extent; but your measure, though for political purposes it may partially succeed, yet, as a message of peace, it will be a failure." . . "If Sir Robert Peel were himself a native of Ireland, suffering under the consequences of the exclusive system which there prevailed," Mr. Sheil asked, "would he not demand equality—equality in all respects, social, political, official, and ecclesiastical?" . . "You know in your heart—you know that that would be your answer—you know that nothing else would satisfy you—you know that nothing else will or ought to satisfy us; and I tell you at this, the close of the fifth session of your parliament, that if that equality shall be withheld, all your half-measures will be in vain; and if you shall persevere in that course, if you persist in your fatal procrastination, the country will be brought to such a pass, that at last a terrible outbreak will take place—the passions of the people will burst into a fatal eruption. England will put it down—I know it. You will have established what you call 'peace'; but with your tranquillity desolation will be associated, and you will cover one of the finest islands of the ocean into a solitude in which the rights, the liberties, and the hopes of the one country, and the honour, the character, and the virtue of the other, will be entombed for ever."

The liberal principles recently adopted by the government were not confined to showing respect towards Roman Catho-

lics. A great advance was made to the removal of civil disabilities from all persons professing forms of religion different from that established by the State. Early in the session Lord Chancellor Lyndhurst introduced a bill for the relief of persons of the Jewish persuasion from certain tests which had previously been required upon their election to municipal offices. In the Upper House it met no effective opposition, and in the Commons its chief opponents were Sir Robert H. Inglis and Mr. Plumptre, who could only find eleven other members to support their sentiments. Outside of doors, however, the very strict religionists, whose efforts had mainly contributed to the raising of Sir Robert Peel to office, bitterly expressed, and still more keenly felt, their dissatisfaction at the concessions made to the Jews and to the Roman Catholics of Ireland. The health of the premier ceased to be toasted in the combination-rooms of Oxford, and the mention of his name was no longer received with thunders of applause at Exeter Hall. The Orange press of Ireland openly denounced him as a traitor to their cause; and some of the papers which had hitherto steadily supported him in England, began "to hint some faults, and hesitate dislike." In fact, all the support which Protestant prejudice had previously given to the cabinet, was irretrievably broken and cast away before the session of 1845 had reached its close.

The Protectionists suspected the premier of secretly coqueting with the leaders of the Anti-Corn-Law League, but most unjustly. In the League the premier was regarded as the greatest impediment to the immediate triumph of Free Trade; they believed that he would, in all probability, propose some compromise, which would retain the principle of protection, and perhaps give it fresh strength, by removing those details which brought its operations, in their most offensive form, under the notice of the people. They looked

upon the premier as a minister that was always immediately in the rear of public opinion ; one who recorded what the popular voice affirmed ; but who never assumed the office of a guide.

The session had scarcely closed when there came sad and signal proof that Mr. Darby had not been quite so absurd as was generally supposed, when he pointed out the barometer as the true index to future legislation. The summer was wet and cold ; the crops of grain were not ripened, and before the month of August closed it was certain that the wheat-harvest would be late, and more than probable that it would be deficient. As the autumn advanced, the gloom over the country became darker and deeper ; the delay of the harvest was more protracted, and the deficiency greater than even the most sensitive alarmists had at first anticipated. Visions of monetary crisis, mercantile panic, industrial distress, fiscal deficit, and a general national collapse, began to float before the imagination, and to excite anxiety even in the most sanguine. This sensitiveness of the public mind was immensely increased by the vast amount of capital engaged in railway speculations, for which there had been a perfect *mania* during the spring and summer. More than eight hundred new railway plans were deposited at the Board of Trade, representing an expenditure far beyond any which the resources of the country could sustain at the best of times, and under the most favourable circumstances.\* When capital was thus

\* We take the following estimate from that excellent paper, the *Spectator* :—  
“THE COMING ‘CALLS.’—The fervour of railway speculation having for a moment abated, it may not be amiss to glance at the probable effect upon the money market of the proceedings of the past and anticipated results of the next session of parliament. The amount required to complete the railways in Great Britain and Ireland, for which bills were obtained last session, is £44,322,325 ; and for this expense 2841 miles of railway are to be completed in three years ; but as the cost of these undertakings generally exceeds the estimate, the sum required for this purpose may be fairly estimated at £48,000,000 ; so that, for the next three years, the parties interested will be

pledged, a sudden drain of gold, to purchase a large import of corn, in order to supply the deficiencies of the harvest, could not take place without producing the most serious derangements to the monetary, the commercial, and the manufacturing interests of the community.

At this crisis a new and unexpected calamity fell upon the nation. A blight suddenly destroyed the potatoe-crop ; the food of a large proportion of the people of England, and of the entire people of Ireland, was instantly and all but totally annihilated. At first there were hopes that the danger was exaggerated ; the escape of some localities was mentioned ; the blight was declared to be partial ; and, for a short time, its progress really appeared to be checked. But before the end of September all doubts on the subject were removed ; the country stood on the very brink of famine. We are indebted to Professor Lindley for the following account of the potatoe-blight, published at a time when doubts were thrown on the extent of its ravages :—

“ A fatal malady has broken out among the potatoe-crop. On all sides we hear of the destruction that has overtaken this valuable product, excepting in the north of England. In Belgium the fields are said to have been entirely desolated.

called upon to advance at the rate of about £1,500,000 a month. The new schemes for the coming session have been roughly estimated to cost £150,000,000 ; but if we take them at £100,000,000 we shall find that it will require £10,000,000 to provide the cautionary deposit before the bills can be proceeded with. The House of Commons have excepted all those schemes already provisionally registered from the operation of the standing order, which requires a preliminary deposit of ten per cent : but the standing orders of the House of Lords contain no such exception, and the promoters of all new schemes will be called upon for ten per cent deposit before they can proceed a single step in the upper House. Reckoning, therefore, the calls alluded to at a million and a half per month, and assuming that they commence about the end of the present year, nearly £20,000,000 will be required before the end of the next session of parliament, for the purpose of railway speculation.” It is only just to add, that several powerful articles appeared in *The Times*, pointing out the perils of such insane speculation.

There is hardly a sound sample in Covent Garden market. In fact, the murrain seems to have been transferred from cattle to potatoes. The disease consists in a gradual decay of the leaves and stem, which become a putrid mass, and the tubers are affected by degrees in a similar way. The first obvious sign is the appearance, on the edge of the leaf, of a black spot, which gradually spreads; then gangrene attacks the haulm, and in a few days the latter is decayed, emitting a peculiar and rather offensive odour. When it is severe, the tubers also decay; in other cases they are comparatively uninjured.

"The cause of this calamity is, we think, clearly traceable to the season. During all the first weeks of August the temperature has been cold—from two to three degrees below the average: we have had incessant rain, and no sunshine. It is hardly possible to conceive that such a continuation of circumstances should have produced any other result, all things considered. The potatoe absorbs a very large quantity of water. Its whole construction is framed with a view to its doing so; and its broad succulent leaves are provided in order to enable it to part with this water. But a low temperature is unfavourable to the motion of the fluids, or to the action of the cells of the plant; and, moreover, sunlight is required in order to enable the water sent into the leaves to be perspired. In feeble light the amount of perspiration from a plant is comparatively small: in bright sunshine it is copious. In fact, the amount of perspiration is in exact proportion to the quantity of light that falls upon a leaf. At night, or in darkness, there is no appreciable action of this kind. During the present season all this important class of functions has been deranged. The potatoes have been compelled to absorb an unusual quantity of water: the lowness of temperature has prevented their digesting it, and the absence of sunlight has rendered it impossible for them to get rid of it by per-

spiration. Under these circumstances, it necessarily stagnated in their interior ; and the inevitable result of that was rot, for a reason to be presently explained. If the first days of July had not been suddenly hot, it would not have happened ; if we had had sunlight with the rain, it would not have happened ; and perhaps it would not have occurred had the temperature been high instead of low, even although the sun did not shine, and rain fell incessantly. It is the combination of untoward circumstances that has produced the mischief.” \*

It was obvious to everybody that artificial restrictions on the import of food could not be longer maintained in the presence of so fearful a calamity. Lord John Russell wrote a letter to his constituents in the city of London, abandoning for ever his projects of a fixed duty, and adopting the League principles of Free Trade.\* Cabinet council

\* Gardener’s Chronicle, September, 1845.

† The following is a copy of this most important letter :—

“ *To the Electors of the City of London.*

“ Gentlemen,—The present state of the country in regard to its supply of food, cannot be viewed without apprehension. Forethought and bold precaution may meet any serious evils—indcision and procrastination may produce a state of suffering which it is frightful to contemplate.

“ Three weeks ago it was generally expected that parliament would be immediately called together. The announcement, that ministers were prepared at that time to advise the crown to summon parliament, and to propose, on their first meeting, a suspension of the import duties on corn, would have caused orders at once to be sent to various parts of Europe and America, for the purchase and transmission of grain for the consumption of the United Kingdom. An order in council dispensing with the law was neither necessary nor desirable. No party in parliament would have made itself responsible for the obstruction of a measure so urgent and so beneficial.

“ The Queen’s ministers have met and separated without affording us any prospect of such seasonable relief.

“ It becomes us, therefore, the Queen’s subjects, to consider how we can best avert, or, at all events, mitigate calamities of no ordinary magnitude.

“ Two evils require your consideration. One of these is the disease in the potatoes, affecting, very seriously, parts of England and Scotland, and committing fearful ravages in Ireland.

after cabinet council was held, manifesting the anxiety and perplexity of the ministry, but it was not until the 3rd of December, that the secret of their deliberations oozed out.

" The extent of this evil has not yet been ascertained ; and every week, indeed, tends either to reveal unexpected disease, or to abate in some districts the alarm previously entertained. But there is one misfortune peculiar to the failure in this particular crop. The effect of a bad corn-harvest is, in the first place, to diminish the supply in the market, and to raise the price. Hence, diminished consumption, and the privation of incipient scarcity, by which the whole stock is more equally distributed over the year, and the ultimate pressure is greatly mitigated. But the fear of the breaking out of this unknown disease in the potatoe induces the holders to hurry into the market, and thus we have, at one and the same time, rapid consumption and impending deficiency, scarcity of the article, and cheapness of price. The ultimate suffering must thereby be rendered far more severe than it otherwise would be. The evil to which I have adverted, may be owing to an adverse season, to a mysterious disease in the potatoe, to want of science, or of care in propagating the plant. In any of these causes, Government is no more subject to blame for the failure of the potatoe-crop than it was entitled to credit for the plentiful corn-harvests which we have lately enjoyed.

" Another evil, however, under which we are suffering, is the fruit of ministerial counsel and parliamentary law. It is the direct consequence of an act of parliament, passed three years ago, on the recommendation of the present advisers of the crown. By this law, grain of all kinds has been made subject to very high duties on importation. These duties are so contrived that the worse the quality of the corn, the higher is the duty, so that when good wheat rises to seventy shillings a quarter, the average price of all wheat is fifty-seven shillings or fifty-eight shillings, and the duty fifteen shillings or fourteen shillings a quarter. Thus the corn-barometer points to fair, while the ship is bending under a storm.

" This defect was pointed out many years ago by writers on the Corn Laws, and was urged upon the attention of the House of Commons, when the present act was under consideration.

" But I confess, that on the general subject, my views have in the course of twenty years undergone a great alteration. I used to be of opinion that corn was an exception to the general rules of political economy ; but observation and experience have convinced me that we ought to abstain from all interference with the supply of food. Neither a government nor a legislature can ever regulate the corn market with the beneficial effects which the entire freedom of sale and purchase are sure of themselves to produce.

" I have for several years endeavoured to obtain a compromise on this subject. In 1839 I voted for a committee of the whole House, with the view of supporting the substitution of a moderate fixed duty for the sliding-scale. In

On the morning of that day, the *Times* announced that Sir Robert Peel and a section of the cabinet had resolved on the repeal of the Corn Laws, and on the early assembling

1841 I announced the intention of the then government of proposing a fixed duty of eight shillings a quarter. In the past session, I proposed the imposition of some lower duty.

"These propositions were successively rejected. The present First Lord of the Treasury met them in 1839, 1840, and 1841, by eloquent panegyrics on the existing system—the plenty it had caused, the rural happiness it had diffused. He met the propositions for diminished protection in the same way in which he had met the offer of securities for Protestant interests in 1817 and 1825—in the same way in which he had met the proposal to allow Manchester, Leeds, and Birmingham to send members to parliament in 1830.

"The result of resistance to qualified concessions must be the same in the present instance as in those I have mentioned. It is no longer worth while to contend for a fixed duty. In 1841 the Free-trade party would have agreed to a duty of eight shillings a quarter on wheat, and after a lapse of years this duty might have been further reduced and ultimately abolished. But the imposition of any duty at present, without a provision for its extinction within a short period, would but prolong a contest already sufficiently fruitful of animosity and discontent. The struggle to make bread scarce and dear, when it is clear that part at least of the additional price goes to increase rent, is a struggle deeply injurious to an aristocracy, which (this quarrel once removed) is strong in property, strong in the construction of our legislature, strong in opinion, strong in ancient associations, and the memory of immortal services.

"Let us then unite to put an end to a system which has been proved to be the blight of commerce—the bane of agriculture—the source of bitter division among classes, the cause of penury, fever, mortality, and crime, among the people.

"But if this end is to be achieved, it must be gained by the unequivocal expression of the public voice. It is not to be denied that many elections for cities and towns in 1841, and some in 1845, appear to favour the assertion that Free-trade is not popular with the great mass of the community. The government appear to be waiting for some excuse to give up the present Corn Law. Let the people, by petition, by address, by remonstrance, afford them the excuse they seek. Let the ministry propose such a revision of the taxes as in their opinion may render the public burdens more just and more equal; let them add any other provisions which caution and even scrupulous forbearance may suggest; but let the removal of restrictions on the admission of the main articles of food and clothing used by the mass of the people, be required in plain terms, as useful to all great interests, and indispensable to the progress of the nation.—I have the honour to be, gentlemen, your obedient servant,

"Edinburgh, Nov. 22."

"J. RUSSELL."

of parliament for the purpose. This was denied by the papers in the interest of the Protectionists; some days of painful anxiety followed; but at length all uncertainty was removed by the astounding intelligence that Sir Robert Peel had resigned, and that Lord John Russell had been invited by her Majesty to form an administration.

III.

3 H

## CHAPTER X.

## REPEAL OF THE CORN LAWS.

THE announcement of Sir Robert Peel's resignation took the country by surprise ; many doubted whether the real cause had been assigned ; they could not believe that he despaired of maintaining the Corn Laws, especially as there were many who maintained that the danger of an Irish famine had been grossly exaggerated. It was one of the most painful proofs of the discreditable condition to which the Irish press has been reduced by the long continuance of factious agitation ; that the very existence of the potatoe-rot was long made the subject of fierce controversy ; and when at length the fatal calamity was too palpable to be denied, fresh discussions were raised as to the extent of the failure, which was on one side declared to be restricted to narrow limits, and on the other to be universal throughout the country.

Public opinion was not sufficiently ripened for the advent of a Whig ministry. *Punch*, that admirable representative of genuine English humour and popular feeling, very happily represented the prevailing sentiments of the day in a witty caricature. It depicted Lord John Russell and Sir Robert Peel as rival candidates for the office of errand-boy to Queen Victoria ; and her Majesty as settling the claims of the former, by saying, “I am afraid, John, you are not strong enough for the place.” Though Lord John Russell promptly undertook the task confided to him by the Queen, he found that his political associates did not display equal readiness. Dissensions and jealousies prevailed among the aspirants to

the vacant premiership, and considerable doubt existed among many judicious members of the Whig body, whether it consisted with the true policy of their party, to undertake, at the existing juncture, so hazardous an enterprise as the formation of an administration pledged to an alteration in the Corn Laws tantamount to their total repeal, in the face of a very powerful opposition, both in parliament and in the country.

Sir Robert Peel had foreseen these difficulties, and had done his utmost to obviate them by addressing a letter to the Queen, in which, having shown the impolicy of the Corn Laws, and the impossibility of maintaining them, he offered, as a private member of parliament, to support any ministry chosen by her Majesty to effect their abolition. The following is a copy of this important letter:—

“ Whitehall, December 8, 1845.

“ Sir Robert Peel presents his humble duty to your Majesty, and, influenced by no other motive than the desire to contribute, if possible, to the relief of your Majesty from embarrassment, and to the protection of the public interests from injury, is induced to make to your Majesty this confidential communication, explanatory of Sir Robert Peel’s position, and intentions with regard to the great question which is now agitating the public mind.

“ Your Majesty can, if you think fit, make this communication known to the minister who, as successor to Sir Robert Peel, may be honoured by your Majesty’s confidencee.

“ On the 1st of November last, Sir Robert Peel advised his colleagues, on account of the alarming accounts from Ireland, and many districts in this country, as to the failure of the potatoe crop from disease, and for the purpose of guarding against contingencies, which in his opinion were not improbable, humbly to recommend to your Majesty, that the duties on the import of foreign grain should be sus-

pended for a limited period, either by order in counceil, or by legislative enaetment; parliament, in either ease, being summoned without delay.

“ Sir Robert Peel foresaw that this suspension, fully justified by the tenor of the report to which he has referred, would compel, during the interval of suspension, the reconsideration of the Corn Laws.

“ If the opinions of his colleagues had then been in concurrence with his own, he was fully prepared to take the responsibility of suspension—and of the necessary consequence of suspension, a comprehensive review of the laws imposing restrictions on the import of foreign grain, and other artieles of food, with a view to their gradual diminution, and ultimate removal.

“ He was disposed to recommend that any new laws to be enaeted should eontain, within themselves, the principle of gradual reduction and final repeal.

“ Sir Robert Peel is prepared to support, in a private capaeity, measures which may be in general conformity with those whieh he advised as a minister.

“ It would be unbeeoming in Sir Robert Peel to make any reference to the details of such measures.

“ Your Majesty has been good enough to inform Sir Robert Peel, that it is your intention to propose to Lord John Russell, to undertake the formation of a government.

“ The principle on which Sir Robert Peel was prepared to reeommend the reconsideration of the laws affecting the import of the main artieles of food, was in general aecordance with that referred to in the concluding paragraph of Lord John Russell’s letter to the electors of the eity of London.

“ Sir Robert Peel wished to accompany the removal of restriction on the admission of such articles, with relief to the land from any charges that may be unduly onerous, and

with such other provisions, as, in the terms of Lord John Russell's letter, caution and even scrupulous forbearance may suggest.

"Sir Robert Peel will support measures founded on that general principle, and will exercise any influence he may possess to promote their success."

Perhaps there never was a time when a coalition between the parties headed by Lord John Russell and Sir Robert Peel, on the basis of Free Trade, Equitable Finance, and Progressive Reform, would have been more beneficial to the country. Sir Robert Peel had with him some rising young statesmen, such as Lords Dalhousie and Lincoln, the Honourable Sydney Herbert, the Honourable G. P. Smythe, and some others, who would have been more efficient in the departments of government, than many of the Whig politicians, to whose circle Lord John Russell's choice was limited. On the other hand, Sir Robert Peel, relieved from the cares and embarrassments of leadership, might have put forth all his powers to enunciate great political truths, uninfluenced by party bias, and would have governed the parliament the more efficiently, by seeming to have abandoned all claim to authority. It was a grievance to himself, and to the nation, that he was compelled to resume office as the leader of a party, at a time when his own conscientious convictions, and the irresistible urgency of circumstances, compelled him to break through what are usually regarded as the most binding of party obligations. He found himself forced to be the instrument of a fundamental change in that policy, of which he had been so long the foremost champion and most trusted supporter. It is impossible to conceive any task more repugnant to the feeling of any statesman, possessing the least share of sensitive feeling, than that which the restored premier was about to undertake. He had to face, not merely obloquy and misrepresentation, but desperate fury and the

rage of despair from the Protectionists, who had raised him to power for the express purpose of maintaining that cause which he was now about to abandon ;—the reproaches of his former supporters had enough of truth in them to render them most stinging and poignant ;—he could calculate on the votes of his political opponents, but he could not so far rely upon their forbearance as to hope to escape their sneers and taunts : however justified by his own conscience, still that inward monitor must have reminded him that he was sacrificing his consistency, and retracting oft-repeated and recorded convictions ; the honourable ambition of guiding the counsels of the state could bring him no consolation, for he could not disguise from himself that the inevitable result of a new course of policy must be the abdication of a position which he had achieved with so much industry, and maintained with such distinguished good fortune—these were the terms upon which Sir Robert Peel prepared to resume the coveted but very unenviable functions of first minister of the crown.

Nor was this all : it must be further taken into consideration, that while the burdens of office were certain to be more onerous, and its vexations more galling than at any former period of his official history, the temptations which it offered were little calculated to seduce the most covetous or ambitious aspirant to power. It was resumed notoriously and avowedly for a single purpose—he became premier merely to carry a single measure ; when that was done, he saw—and everybody saw—that the disruption of his party would render his immediate removal from office inevitable, and that too with a very distant prospect, if any, of return.

No man whom party-spirit has not rendered blind to the perception of passing events—no man whom disappointed expectations has not rendered deaf to the most simple arguments—no man whom personal or party resentment has not

transported beyond the bounds of reason, can venture to impugn the honesty of the motives by which Sir Robert Peel was actuated at this most important crisis of his public life. The course which he adopted involved the sacrifice of every object and every feeling most dear to a political leader ; it was equally fatal to the reputation of the past, and the prospects of the future. Moreover, it had antecedents, the shadows of which, cast from behind, greatly deepened its gloom : he, the chosen champion of the church, had carried the repeal of the Test and Corporation acts ;—he, the trusted advocate of Protestant Ascendancy, had conceded Catholic Emancipation ;—he, whose party had won its way back to power chiefly by stimulating all the vulgar prejudices of Englishmen against Ireland and the Catholic religion, had enlarged the Maynooth grant, and was more than suspected of not being unfavourable to the endowment of the Romish priesthood. A new violation of what was an implied promise—a new breach of what was regarded as a delegated trust, could not fail to expose him to a storm of obloquy and reproach, under which nothing could have supported him but a consciousness that he was incurring all these personal sacrifices to promote the public welfare. It was a political martyrdom of the noblest description ; it was the voluntary submission to stings and tortures, infinitely more agonizing and more difficult to endure than

“ Luke’s iron crown, and Damien’s bed of steel.”

Where a statesman has everything personally dear to lose, and nothing to gain, by a change of policy, it requires infinitely more than the ordinary perversity of faction, to discredit his motives. There is all the difference in the world between a candid avowal of past error, and an open disreception of principle.

Sir Robert Peel did not receive full justice from the nation for the enormous sacrifices he made at this crisis. The Whigs

saw, in these painful sacrifices, nothing but retribution for the sanction he had given to the factious cries which had hurled them from office. Such a feeling was natural, and was not wholly unjustifiable ; Mr. Macaulay, as we have shown, had predicted this very result, when Peel stood on the threshold of power ; and never yet was there a prophet who did not rejoice at witnessing the literal fulfilment of his own vaticinations.

Among the leaders of the League, though there were many who appreciated Peel's position, and duly estimated the enormous sacrifices he was about to make for their cause, yet there were others who did not like that the Free-trade movement should have so tranquil and apparently so inglorious a termination. Indulgence in political agitation is not unlike indulgence in the stimulus of intoxicating liquors, the habit once formed is not easily broken. All the parliamentary leaders of the League, however, were satisfied with the measures adopted by the premier ; they felt convinced that success could only be attained under his auspices, or at least that their rejection of his proffers would be to exchange a valuable certainty for a future of most precarious chances.

Ireland was in a state of collapse and exhaustion ; the health of its great leader was fast giving way under the infirmities of age, the insidious approaches of disease, and the mortifications arising from an agitation, the guidance of which was slipping from his hands. O'Connell to the last, never forgave Peel ; or, what is the same thing, believed that Peel had never forgiven him, and therefore in the last phase of the struggle, he maintained a silent and sulky neutrality.

With a single exception, the entire cabinet felt it to be their duty to stand by Sir Robert Peel to the last, and to give countenance to his change of policy by retaining

office under him. Many of them, in doing so, made sacrifices to their confidence in their leader, the same in kind, though not in degree, as their leader himself had made, to promote the welfare of the community. Lord Stanley retired from the office of Secretary of the Colonies, and was succeeded by Mr. W. E. Gladstone, whose previous resignation of the Board of Trade, when the increase of the Maynooth grant was contemplated, has been recorded in a preceding chapter. The retirement of Lord Stanley excited neither surprise nor regret; it had long been known that his presence in the cabinet was an equal source of annoyance to himself and his colleagues, while his injudicious administration of the colonies had created almost universal dissatisfaction throughout the empire.

Parliament met on the 19th of January, an earlier period than usual. A more than ordinary share of interest and excitement was felt about the contents of the royal speech, which was delivered by her Majesty in person. The paragraphs announcing the change of ministerial policy were as follow:—

“I have to lament that in consequence of a failure of the potatoe crop in several parts of the United Kingdom, there will be a deficient supply of an article of food which forms the chief subsistence of great numbers of my people. The disease by which the plant has been affected, has prevailed to the utmost extent in Ireland. I have adopted all such precautions as it was in my power to adopt for the purpose of alleviating the sufferings which may be caused by this calamity, and I shall confidently rely on your co-operation in devising such other means for effecting the same benevolent purpose, as may require the sanction of the legislature.

“I have had great satisfaction in giving my assent to the measures which you have presented to me from time to time, calculated to extend commerce, and to stimulate domestic

skill and industry, by the repeal of prohibitory and the relaxation of protecting duties. The prosperous state of the revenue, the increased demand for labour, and the general improvement which has taken place in the internal condition of the country, are strong testimonies in favour of the course you have pursued.

"I recommend you to take into your early consideration, whether the principles on which you have acted may not with advantage be yet more extensively applied, and whether it may not be in your power, after a careful review of the existing duties upon many articles, the produce or manufacture of other countries, to make such further reductions and remissions as may tend to insure the continuance of the great benefits to which I have adverted, and by enlarging our commercial intercourse, to strengthen the bonds of amity with foreign powers."

The debate on the address in the House of Lords, was brief and unanimated; the Duke of Richmond bitterly attacked Peel, and Lord Brougham rather feebly assailed the League: all felt that the principal interest was concentrated in the House of Commons, which was crowded almost to suffocation.

In the House of Commons, the address was moved by Lord Francis Egerton (since Earl of Ellesmere), who, twenty years before, had stood in the same position under Mr. Canning, a circumstance to which he alluded with a graceful pathos, that produced a marked effect on the feelings of the House. It was seconded by Mr. Beckett Denison, who had succeeded Lord Morpeth in the representation of the West Riding of Yorkshire, as an advocate of protection in opposition to the Free-trade opinions of his lordship. Neither speech was remarkable; but at the conclusion of the seconder's speech, Sir Robert Peel took the very unusual course of immediately presenting himself to the House, for



THE RT HONBLE CHARLES LENNOX, DUKE OF RICHMOND

*Richmonde*



the purpose of at once announcing his intended change of policy, and vindicating its motives. Amid the most profound silence, he thus spoke :—

“ Sir,—I would fain hope, that although the course I take is an unusual one, yet that I am acting in conformity with the general wish of the House, in availing myself of the very earliest opportunity of giving that explanation which, at no remote period, the House will require from me. I would fain hope that I am not obstructing the course of the discussion upon the address, by giving that explanation at this period. But if no consideration of public advantage could justify me in taking this course, I am sure the generous feelings of the House will deem it only natural that I should desire that not a moment should escape before I explain to the House the motives by which I have been actuated, and the principles which have governed my conduct. I may feel hurt at having been the object of much accusation upon vague surmise ; I may think it unjust to have been condemned without a hearing—I say nothing upon that head ; if any momentary feelings of indignation were aroused, the reelection of great indulgence and of great confidence was quite sufficient to efface those temporary feelings. I shall make no allusion, therefore, to particular expressions, or particular accusations ; but this I do ask, even while I do not require the reversal of the sentence ; I ask for the opportunity, after condemnation, of explaining the motives of my conduct ? I ask you to listen, at least, with patience and indulgence to those facts and that evidence which I shall this night adduce, and which will form the materials on which other tribunals, judging under less excitement, will ultimately pronounce upon the motives and the conduct of men charged with deep responsibility in critical times. I wish to explain what were the grounds which led me, and those with whom I acted, humbly to tender to a gracious Sovereign the resignation of the trust

which was committed to us. I wish also to explain what were the circumstances under which that trust was reassumed, and under which I now appear in the House as the Minister of the Crown.

“Sir,—The immediate cause which led to the dissolution of the government in the early part of last December, was that great and mysterious calamity which caused a lamentable failure in an article of food on which great numbers of the people in this part of the United Kingdom, and still larger numbers in the sister kingdom, depend mainly for their subsistence. That was the immediate and proximate cause which led to the dissolution of the government. But it would be unfair and uncandid on my part, if I attached undue importance to that particular cause. It certainly appears to me to preclude further delay, and to require immediate decision—decision, not only from the measures it was necessary at the time to adopt, but also as to the course to be ultimately taken with regard to the laws which govern the importation of grain. I will not assign to that cause too much weight. I will not withhold the homage which is due to the progress of reason and of truth, by denying that my opinions on the subject of protection have undergone a change. Whether holding a private station, or placed in a public one, I will assert the privilege of yielding to the force of argument and conviction, and acting upon the result of enlarged experience. It may be supposed that there is something humiliating in making such admissions ; sir, I feel no such humiliation. I have not so much confidence in the capacity of man to determine what is right or wrong intuitively, as to make me feel ashamed at admitting that I have been in error. I should feel humiliation if, having modified or changed my opinion, I declined to acknowledge the change for fear of incurring the imputation of inconsistency.

“The question is, whether the facts are sufficient to account

for the change, and the motives for it are pure and disinterested. Nothing could be more base on the part of a public man than to protect himself from danger by pretending a change of opinions; or more inconsistent with the duty he owes to his sovereign and country, than if, seeing reason to alter his course, he forbore to make the alteration by the fear of being taunted with inconsistency. The real question, as I have said, is whether the motives for the modification of opinion are sufficient, and sincere. Sir, those who contend for the removal of impediments upon the import of a great article of subsistence, such as corn, start with an immense advantage in the argument. The natural presumption is in favour of free and unrestricted importation.

"It may, indeed, be possible to combat that presumption; it may be possible to meet its advocates in the field of argument, by showing that there are other and greater advantages arising out of the system of prohibition, than out of the system of unrestricted intercourse; but even those who so contend, will, I think, admit that the natural feelings of mankind are strongly in favour of the absence of all restriction, and that the presumption is so strong, that we must combat it by an avowal of some great public danger to be avoided, or some great public benefit to be obtained, by restriction on the importation of food. We all admit that the argument in favour of high protection, or prohibition, on the ground that it is for the benefit of a particular class, is untenable. The most strenuous advocates for protection have abandoned that argument; they rest, and wisely rest the defence of protective duties upon higher principles. They have alleged, as I have myself alleged, that there were public reasons for retaining this protection. Sir, circumstances made it absolutely necessary for me, occupying the public station I do, and seeing the duty that must unavoidably devolve on me—it became absolutely necessary for me maturely to consider whether the

grounds on which an alteration of the Corn Laws can be resisted are tenable. The arguments in favour of protection must be based either on the principle that protection to domestic industry is in itself sound policy, and that therefore agriculture being a branch of domestic industry, is entitled to share in that protection ; or, that in a country like ours, encumbered with an enormous load of debt, and subject to great taxation, it is necessary that domestic industry should be protected from competition with foreigners ; or, again—the interests of this body of the community, the laborious classes, being committed in this question—that the rate of wages varies with the price of provisions, that high prices imply high wages, and that low wages are the concomitants of low prices. Further, it may be said, that the land is entitled to protection on account of some peculiar burdens which it bears.

“ But this is a question of justice rather than of policy. I have always felt and maintained that the land is subject to peculiar burdens ; but you have the power of weakening the force of that argument, by the removal of the burden, or by making compensation. The first three objections to the removal of protection are objections founded on considerations of public policy.

“ The last is a question of justice, which may be determined by giving some counterbalancing advantage. Now, I want not to deprive those who, arguing *à priori*, without the benefit of experience, have come to the conclusion, that protection is objectionable in principle ; I want not to deprive them of any credit which is fairly their due. Reason, unaided by experience, brought conviction to their minds. My opinions have been modified by the experience of the last three years. I have had the means and opportunity of comparing the results of periods of abundance and low prices with periods of scarcity and high prices. I have carefully

watched the effect of the one system, and of the other. First, of the policy we have been steadily pursuing for some years —viz., the removal of protection from domestic industry; and, next, of the policy which the friends of protection recommend. I have also had an opportunity of marking, from day to day, the effect upon great social interests, of freedom of trade and comparative abundance. I have not failed to note the result of preceding years, and to contrast them with the results of the last three years; and I am led to the conclusion, that the main grounds of public policy on which protection has been defended, are not tenable; at least, *I* cannot maintain them.

“I do not believe, after the experience of the last three years, that the rate of wages varies with the price of food. I do not believe that with high prices, wages will necessarily rise in the same ratio. I do not believe that a low price of food necessarily implies a low rate of wages. Neither can I maintain that protection to domestic industry is necessarily good. I said last year, on the motion of the noble lord (Lord John Russell), that I thought protective duties were evils in themselves; but I said also, that as they had grown with our system, and not been incompatible with a high degree of prosperity, I thought they ought not to be lightly abolished, and must be tenderly and cautiously dealt with.

“It is now, however, impossible for us, after we see the results in the change of the tariff during the last four years, to contend that protection to industry is, in itself, and abstractedly, a public good. Then, as to the other argument, which I confess made a great impression on me in the first instance, and which is sanctioned by great authority—that because we have a heavy debt, and a high rate of taxation, we must be protected from competition with foreign industry—that argument has also been submitted to the test of the last three years, and, so far as the experience of that period can

supply an argument, it is this, that a large debt and heavy taxation are best encountered by abundance and cheapness of provisions; which rather alleviate than add to the weight of the burden. Let us take the result of that experience of constantly diminished protection—on wages, on trade, and on revenue. First, as to wages. Who can deny the fact that during the three years that preceded the month of October last, prices were comparatively low? there was comparative cheapness and plenty, and yet at no period were the wages of labour higher. If you take the three preceding years, you will find high prices, and coexistent with high prices you will find low wages. Well, then, I have six years' experience, I have during the first three years high prices and low wages; I have during the last three years low prices and high wages; and I cannot resist the conclusion that wages do not vary with the price of provisions."

He then entered into a variety of minute statistical details, for the purpose of showing that previous relaxations of protective duties had led to increased prosperity of the general community, but more especially of the operative and working classes. The dangers of famine arising from the failure of the potatoe crop in Ireland next engaged his attention, and he produced the most alarming descriptions of its ravages from all parts of the country. He then defended himself and his colleagues for not having given premature publicity to these returns, and stated that he had sent two men of the greatest eminence in British science to investigate the nature of the disease. The conclusions which he deduced from the statistical returns, of the commercial and social effects produced by the relaxations of protecting duties, were thus forcibly stated.—

"I think, as far as we have experience within the last four years, I have shown that by the removal of protection, domestic industry, and the great social interests of the

country, have been promoted; crime has diminished, and morality has improved. I can bring the most conclusive proof that the public health has been improved, yet the national trade has been extending, our exports have increased; and this—and I rejoice in it—has been effected, not only without serious injury to those interests from which protection was withdrawn; but I think I have shown that it has been concurrent with an increase in the prices of those articles. Now, it is right I should state, that notwithstanding the conviction which this experience has brought home to my mind, yet my decided impression was, that on other grounds the charge of considering the change in the present Corn Law ought not to have devolved upon me. This I was firmly resolved upon, that I could not this session, on the motion of the right honourable gentleman (Mr. Villiers), for the consideration of the Corn Laws; I could not with these convictions, which, say as you will, I cannot withstand, have met this motion with a direct negative. Now, sir, let me again repeat, that I claim no credit whatever for having drawn my conclusions from abstract reasoning. My conviction has been brought about by observation and experience; and I could not, with this conviction, have undertaken the defence of the Corn Laws, either upon the public ground that this country being highly taxed, the continuance of protection was necessary, or upon the ground, that it was for the interest of the labouring classes that high prices should continue, as a guarantee of high wages; and I could not have undertaken it upon the ground that the removing protection from domestic industry must necessarily paralyze commerce, lower prices, and undermine our national prosperity. But this I wish most ardently; I wish to have the opportunity of frankly stating to those gentlemen who have honoured me upon so many occasions with their confidence, that I can continue this contest no longer—that they must devolve the

duty of maintaining protection upon other persons, who can adduce better arguments in its favour than I can. I doubted whether it would not have been advantageous if, in another parliament, this question should have been considered; but it would have been my bounden duty to have committed the defence, if a defence were undertaken, of protection, to other hands more able to maintain the conflict. I should have wished, I say, that another parliament should have had an opportunity of considering this question; but there did occur, during the course of the last autumn, that which precluded me from taking the course which would have been most agreeable to my personal feelings. A great calamity befell us, the limits of which it was difficult to divine; the consequences of which, though felt, it may still be difficult to describe. There occurred a great visitation of Providence, extending not to Ireland only, but to Great Britain, America, and many parts of the world; and we, her Majesty's servants, constituting the government of this country, were called upon to consider what should be done to lessen the calamity? There appeared to be a great and a pressing danger, and it was our duty towards our sovereign and towards the country to meet that danger. If it was advisable, from the pressure of the deficiency to take immediate measures, it would have been impossible, with our conviction of the necessity, to abstain;—with our convictions we could not remain idle, consistently with the duty we owed to the sovereign and the country. If we, indeed, pretended apprehensions of a scarcity for the purpose of effecting an alteration in the Corn Laws, nothing could have been more base or dishonest than to have taken such a step; but you shall have the opportunity of judging of the motives upon which I and others have acted, and you shall determine whether or no, with the information we were in possession of, we were not justified in drawing the conclusion that it was impossible

to maintain the existing commercial system. My own opinion was founded upon the evidence which I shall now adduce; and it was impossible, upon that evidence, to come to any other opinion."

But he seemed resolved to place the chief strength of his case on the failure of the potatoe crop in Ireland, and on the report presented by Dr. Linley and Dr. Lyon Playfair. We have already mentioned that the evidence previously laid before the English public had been of the most conflicting nature. The potatoe-rot had become a party topic in Ireland, the believers and disbelievers in its existence were as deep in controversy as if the question had been the most abstruse doctrine in religion and polities, instead of being a simple matter of fact within the cognizance of everybody's senses. But the disease had appeared in several parts of England and Scotland, especially in the Western Highlands; and, what was most singular, potatoes which had been stored apparently in a sound state subsequently caught the infection. Thus there was not only a certainty of great absolute loss having been already incurred, but also great reason to fear that it would be unsafe to calculate on the security of the stock absolutely on hand. These were alarming symptoms of danger, and Sir Robert Peel thus powerfully showed the immense responsibility which would devolve on the legislature if it disregarded such pregnant signs of coming dangers:—

"The cabinet met several times between the 31st of October and the 6th of November. On the 1st of November, recollect, there was no agitation, and no petitions had been presented. It appeared to me, however, that the reports received from the lord-lieutenant—that the example of foreign countries—that the example of Belgium, which had cleared the market of Liverpool almost in one day, and had caused a rise of seventy-five per cent in the price of rice—

rendered it the duty of the government to take a step which was not without a precedent, and either by an order in council, or by calling parliament together within a fortnight, to remove for a time all restrictions upon the importation of foreign corn. That was the advice I gave on the 1st of November. I was perfectly ready to take the responsibility of issuing an order in council. The period was a critical one. There was an advantage in issuing an order in council, for time would thus have been saved ; and I was prepared, as the head of the government, to take that responsibility. I did not insist, however, upon the order in council ; for I was equally prepared to call parliament together immediately, and to advise the removal, for a limited period, of all restrictions on the importation of corn. I did not consider it any objection that the temporary removal of those restrictions might compel a reconsideration of the tariff. My advice at that period was not followed.

"Three only of my colleagues concurred in the view which I took, and we separated on the 6th of November ; I reserving to myself the right of again calling the cabinet together, in the hope that if the alarm which I apprehended should be confirmed by subsequent occurrences, the advice which I gave would be followed at a later period. Now, so far as I was personally concerned, that was the period for me to have tendered my resignation.

"I can truly say, that if I did not tender it at that time, it was purely from public and not from private considerations. I was met as a Minister by great difficulties ; but I felt it my bounden duty to adhere to my post, and not to evade, as I might have done, those difficulties with which I was beset. I might have said, 'My opinion has been overruled by a great majority. Three only of my colleagues take the same views that I do, and I cannot consent to incur the responsibility of continuing in office.'

"That was the course which I might have adopted. I resolved, however, not to abandon my post. The cabinet was reassembled on the 25th of November. I confess that the information received in the interval had not in the slightest degree diminished my apprehensions. In the meantime we had taken, with the unanimous concurrence of the cabinet, extraordinary steps; we had appointed a commission for the purpose of making inquiries in Ireland, and had taken steps also to prevent the spread of fever, which is so frequently the consequence of distress. On the 25th of November, then, it became necessary to consider what should be the instructions to be issued to the commission.

"Those instructions were determined on, and received the assent of the cabinet. I stated at that time that it appeared to me that the issuing of those instructions was inconsistent with the determination to maintain untouched the present Corn Law. I could not, therefore, consent to the giving instructions to take precautionary measures against scarcity, and against fever, the consequence of scarcity, without reserving to myself the entire power of proposing other measures for relieving that scarcity. The instructions were issued, and again I brought under the consideration of the government the same measure which I brought forward on the 1st of November, that is, the suspension of the duties upon foreign corn, either by an order in council, or by the sanction of Parliament.

"At that period, however, my position was entirely changed. I had advised the same measure on the 1st of November; but the lapse of time, the increase of agitation, and other circumstances, had materially affected my position. I was overruled in the cabinet at the earlier period, when it could have been done more naturally and more effectually; I felt that, by the pressure of circumstances, my position was now changed.

"The noble lord opposite had in the interval written his letter, and I admit, giving him credit for the best intentions, that it was a letter which, after what had passed in the cabinet, materially affected my position. If the order in council had been issued on the 1st of November, it would have been the order of a united cabinet, the act would have appeared as one which was adopted by a united body, and under the sense of a great necessity. We should have anticipated agitation—it would have been impossible to attribute it to fear—it would have had the appearance of taking a natural and reasonable precaution, I will not say against a great calamity, but against the possibility of a great calamity. It was impossible for me, and for those who agreed with me, after receiving the letter I have read from Drs. Lindley and Playfair, not to feel justified in adopting precautionary measures, even if they should afterwards prove to be unnecessary. But I felt on the 26th of November that nothing but the support of a united government, after that letter of the noble lord, would give me the chance of bringing this matter to a successful issue. I should then appear to have adopted the measure because it was recommended by the noble lord. His letter was dated on the 22d of November, the cabinet met on the 26th, and the public impression would have been that the act of the 26th of November was but a servile adoption of the course recommended by the noble lord. Still, notwithstanding this total alteration of my position, I would not have abandoned the post of danger, if I had been supported by a united cabinet. But that was not the result of our deliberations. It was my painful duty to differ from one for whom I have felt the sincerest friendship, for whose public and private character I felt and still feel the highest respect—I mean my noble friend Lord Stanley. The whole of these deliberations passed in the most entire and cordial amity, but his view,

of course sincerely adopted after mature deliberation, was a persuasion that the danger was greatly magnified, and that there was no necessity for the suspension of these laws. That was his opinion. My noble friend stated, not only that a suspension was not necessary, but he thought that there was no necessity for a reconsideration of the Corn Laws. I wish to give my noble friend full credit for having formed his opinion with perfect honesty, both of thought and purpose; but my opinion differed from his. I thought that there was a perfect justification at the time for extraordinary measures, and that the adoption of extraordinary measures would compel the reconsideration of the Corn Law. My noble friend was not the only member of the administration who would have refused me the inestimable aid of his counsel and support; and that being the case—believing, as I did, that his resignation would be followed by that of others—thinking that under such circumstances the attempt to settle the question, which I thought to settle, would fail, and that I should fail after having made new combinations, and that I should be compelled to offer worse terms than the interests in question were entitled to claim at my hands, I felt it to be my duty, not being supported by the unanimous voice of my colleagues, humbly to tender to her Majesty my resignation. That resignation her Majesty was pleased to accept; and as my late colleagues were not prepared themselves to carry on the government, her Majesty, of her own choice, sent for the noble lord. The noble lord undertook the task of forming an administration; I believed then that I was in the situation of a private member—that I was reduced to the ranks—and that I was at entire liberty to act on the suggestions of my own conscience; and I do not hesitate to say, that in that capacity I would have done all in my power to promote the settlement of this question. The duty of adjusting would then have been left to the noble lord; and in my capacity as

a private member, I repeat that I would have done all I could to facilitate a fair and final settlement of this question. I remained under the impression that my functions had ceased until Saturday, the 20th of December. On Thursday, the 18th, it was intimated to me by her Majesty, that the noble lord had undertaken the duty of forming an administration; and on the 19th, I received a gracious communication from her Majesty, stating that as my relation to her Majesty was about to terminate, she wished again to see me, for the purpose of taking a final farewell; and Saturday, the 20th of December, was the day appointed for that purpose.

“Upon waiting on her Majesty—having heard, through the courtesy of the noble lord, that he had found all his efforts to form an administration were in vain—upon waiting on her Majesty, she was pleased to inform me, that so far from my taking my final leave, she was obliged to demand of me that I should withdraw my offer of resignation. Her Majesty had understood from those of my colleagues who had differed from me, that they were unprepared to form, and did not advise, the formation of a government on the principle of the existing protective system.

“That the noble lord, having undertaken the formation of a government, had failed, from causes which it is unnecessary for me to notice, and the noble lord having signified to her Majesty that he had failed in his attempt to form a government, her Majesty requested that I should not persist in the tender of my resignation; I do not hesitate to say, that I informed her Majesty on the instant, and without a moment’s hesitation, that the noble lord having failed, and the colleagues with whom I had heretofore acted not thinking it advisable to form an administration, I did inform her Majesty on the instant, that I would return to town as her Majesty’s minister, that I would withdraw my resignation, and inform my colleagues of my determination, and urge

them to assist me in carrying on the business of the country. I resolved, therefore, to meet them in the capacity of the minister of the crown, and to submit to them the measures I proposed to bring before parliament. My noble friend at once expressed the regret he felt that he could not co-operate with me in the difficult circumstances in which I was placed; but my colleagues generally thought it was their duty to assist me in the arduous task I had undertaken. I have now, sir, stated to the House the circumstances under which I felt it my duty to tender my resignation, and also the circumstances under which I again returned to office. Sir, I have given, on the earliest day on which it is possible, notice, that it is my intention, on the part of the government, to submit to the consideration of the House, measures connected with the commercial and financial affairs of the country."

His reference to the circumstances of his own position was finely conceived, and feelingly expressed. With a voice which betrayed deep emotion by its tremulousness, he said—

"Sir, I have felt, as I said before, that when, after the severe labour of the last session of parliament, almost every hour of the recess was devoted to calculating the chances that might result from the disease, and to collecting evidence on the subject night and day, and adopting precautions against the possibility of the calamity which might result from such a state of the crop—I felt it rather hard to find myself the object of accusations that I was unfaithful to the interests of the country, or to any special and peculiar interest. I cannot, of course, but recollect the repeated manifestations of great confidence which I have at various times experienced. Those manifestations cannot be without their effect on my mind; but, notwithstanding those manifestations of confidence, the constant repetition of those observations to which I have adverted—of those accusations that

I have been unfaithful, renders it absolutely necessary that I should allude to them. I have over and over again attempted to define the relation in which I conceived myself to stand with respect to party, to my country, and to my Sovereign; and it is necessary that I should again describe that relation. I see it over and over again repeated, that I am under a personal obligation for holding the great office which I have the honour to occupy. I see it over and over again repeated, that I was placed in that position by a party, and that the party which elevated me to my present position is powerful enough also to displace me. I see constantly put forth allusions to the power of those men to remove me from office. I am afraid that, with respect to holding the office that I hold, there is a very material difference between the extent of the obligation, and the amount of the penalty. I am not under an obligation to any man, or to any body of men, for being compelled to submit to the sacrifices which I have submitted to, and to undergo the official duties and labours which I have undertaken. I do not under-rate the distinction and importance of the position; but let us understand—and I am speaking not for myself, but for the many honourable men who have preceded me, of different parties—let us understand what is the nature of the obligation we owe for being placed in office. As I said before, I do not undervalue the distinction and the power which are attached to the occupation of that office; but what, I ask, is its real value? It does not consist in the power of distributing honours, or conferring appointments. That power, it is true, is inseparable from the office of prime minister, and cannot be separated from it without injuring its authority; but the power of giving the highest rewards and the highest offices is constantly accompanied by the invidious duty of selection, and the disappointment of those who may not have been selected. For my part, I value power not one farthing for

any such privilege. I have served four sovereigns—George III. and his three successors. In the reign of George III., the office which I held was so subordinate, that it was impossible my services could have attracted his notice; but, as I have said, I also served his three successors—George IV., as regent and king, King William IV., and Queen Victoria; and during the reigns of those sovereigns, it has been my fate to hold some of the highest offices in the state. I served each of those sovereigns at critical times, and in critical circumstances; I did so with constant truth to each; and I constantly said to each of those sovereigns, that there was but one favour—but one distinction—one reward which I desired, that it was in their power to offer me—namely, the simple acknowledgment on their part that I had been to them a loyal and faithful minister. I have now stated my view of the obligations which are conferred on those in power; let me remark, that there is that valuable privilege in power, that it gives constant and favourable opportunities for exertion, and affords great facilities to the holder of it, to render his country service, according to his sense of the public good. That, in my mind, constitutes the real value of official power; and I can say with truth, that I have never abused that power for any unworthy object. I have tried to use it for the promotion of the public interests, and the advancement of the public good. I used it for the public advantage, and in doing so I cannot charge myself with any conduct at variance with the true and comprehensive policy of a Conservative minister."

Lord John Russell then followed, and entered at great length into a detail of the circumstances which had prevented him from forming an administration, when invited by her Majesty to do so a few weeks before. He stated that he had resolved to do so, in spite of all the difficulties and dangers to which he would be exposed; but that, almost at the last

moment, he found that he could not rely upon the expected co-operation of Earl Grey. The noble lord then, at great length, vindicated the principles which he had maintained in his celebrated letter to the electors of London, and satisfactorily showed that it was not in any way a bidding for office against Sir Robert Peel. He asserted that his chief ambition to take office was, in the hope of applying efficient remedial measures to the distracted condition of Ireland. He promised his support to the proposed measures of the premier, but could not avoid referring to the unfair opposition which had been directed against the Melbourne cabinet. "I must say, on this occasion," was the expression of the noble lord, "that during the whole of our administration, our motives never received a fair construction, nor did our measures ever receive an impartial consideration from those who were our political opponents."

The leader of the Protectionists was Lord George Bentinck; but on this occasion, the honour of leading the onslaught against the premier was entrusted to Mr. Benjamin Disraeli, a much more formidable champion and irritating opponent. We have seen that he had anticipated the coming change in Sir Robert Peel's policy, and had attacked him with all his powers of wit and sarcasm, for gradually sliding into the doctrines of Free Trade. But now that the premier had openly abjured his former opinions—now that the inconsistency, which had been only suspected, was publicly avowed, Mr. Disraeli felt that he had his enemy on the hip, and he resolved to use his advantage to the utmost. Our limits will not allow us to transfer the whole of this brilliant invective to these pages, but we must be permitted to make some extracts. Disraeli opened his attack with the following caustic remarks:—

"Sir, I rise with some feeling of embarrassment to address the House at this stage of the debate, as it is only since

I have entered the House that I have had the advantage of reading her Majesty's speech ; and I had understood that the great question which now agitates this country, was not to be discussed on the present occasion. I thought that, under protest perhaps, we should be allowed to address her Majesty in language closely akin to that in which her Majesty had addressed us ; and that all topics which could excite any difference of opinion might be avoided. After the announcement of the right honourable gentleman, that an early day was to be appointed for the discussion of that question, I should have abstained from intruding myself on the House at the present moment, had it not been for the peculiar tone of the right honourable gentleman. I think that tone ought not to pass unnoticed. At the same time, I do not wish to conceal my opinions on the general subject. I am not one of the converts—I am perhaps a member of a fallen party. To the opinions which I have expressed in the House in favour of protection, I adhere. They sent me to this House ; and if I had relinquished them, I should have relinquished my seat also. I must say, that the tone of the right honourable gentleman is hardly fair towards the House, while he stops discussion upon a subject on which he himself has entered, and gives vent to his feelings with a fervency unusual to him. Sir, I admire a minister who says he holds power to give effect to his own convictions. These are sentiments that we must all applaud. Unfortunate will be the position of this country, when a minister pursues a line of policy adverse to the convictions which he himself entertains. But when we come to a question of such high delicacy as the present, we may be permitted to ask ourselves what are the circumstances which require one so able, and one so eminent, to enter upon the vindication of himself, and to rise in this House, amid the cheers of his former opponents, to place himself in a position of an apologetical character ?

I have no doubt that the right honourable gentleman has arrived at a conscientious conclusion on this great subject. The right honourable gentleman says, that it is not so much by force of argument, as by the cogency of observation, that he has arrived at this conclusion. But, sir, surely the observation which the right honourable gentleman has made, might have been made when he filled a post scarcely less considerable than that which he now occupies, and enjoyed power scarcely less ample than that which he now wields in this House. I want to know how it is that the right honourable gentleman, who certainly enjoys the full maturity of manhood, should not have arrived at this opinion, which I deplore, although conscientious, at the moment when his present government was formed? What, sir, are we to think of the eminent statesman, who, having served under four sovereigns—unable to complain of want of experience or royal confidence—who, having been called on to steer the ship on so many occasions, and under such perilous circumstances, has only, during the last three years, found it necessary entirely to change his convictions on that important topic, which must have presented itself for more than a quarter of a century to his consideration? Sir, I must say, that such a minister may be conscientious, but that he is unfortunate. I will also say, that he ought to be the last man in the world to turn round and upbraid his party in a tone of menace. Sir, there is a difficulty in finding a parallel to the position of the right honourable gentleman, in any part of history. The only parallel which I can find, is an incident in the late war in the Levant, which was terminated by the policy of the noble lord opposite. I remember when that great struggle was taking place—when the existence of the Turkish empire was at stake, the late sultan, a man of great energy and fertile in resources, was determined to fit out an immense fleet to maintain his empire.

Accordingly, a vast armament was collected. It consisted of many of the finest ships that were ever built. The crews were picked men, the officers were the ablest that could be found, and both officers and men were rewarded before they fought. There never was an armament which left the Dardanelles similarly appointed, since the days of Solyman the Great. The sultan personally witnessed the departure of the fleet; all the muftis prayed for the success of the expedition, as all the muftis here prayed for the success of the last general election. Away went the fleet; but what was the sultan's consternation, when the lord high admiral steered at once into the enemy's port! Now, sir, the lord high admiral, on that occasion, was very much misrepresented. He, too, was called a traitor; and he, too, vindicated himself. 'True it is,' said he, 'I did place myself at the head of this valiant armament—true it is that my sovereign embraced me—true it is that all the muftis in the empire offered up prayers for my success; but I have an objection to war. I see no use in prolonging the struggle; and the only reason I had for accepting the command was, that I might terminate the contest by betraying my master.' And, sir, these reasons offered by a man of great plausibility, of vast adroitness, have had their effect; for—you may be surprised at it, but I assure you it is a fact, which, by the way, the gallant officer opposite (Commodore Napier) can testify—that he is, at this moment, the First Lord of the Admiralty at Constantinople, under the new reign. [Sir C. Napier: I thought he was dead.] The gallant commodore says that he is dead—at any rate he was not shot for treason. Well, now the right honourable gentleman has turned round on us, and in a peroration, the elaborate character of which remarkably contrasted with the garulous confidence of all the doings of his cabinet, the right honourable gentleman told us, that he had been assured that a certain power had

made him a minister, and that a certain power would prevent him from being a minister; but that he protested against such an authority, and that he never would hold office by so servile a tenure. Sir, no one can fill a position such as that of the right honourable gentleman, and give utterance to sentiments so magnanimous as his, without reference to antecedents. And that leads us to the consideration of that government by parties, which must never be lost sight of in estimating the position of the right honourable gentleman. It is all very well for the right honourable gentleman to say, ‘I am the first minister;’ and, by the by, I think the right honourable gentleman might as well at once adopt the phraseology of Walpole, and call himself the sole minister, for his speech was rich in egotistic rhetoric; it is all very well for him to speak of himself as the sole minister, for as all his cabinet voted against him, he is quite right not to notice them. I repeat, it is all very well for the right honourable gentleman to come forward to this table and say—‘I am thinking of posterity, although, certainly, I am doing on this side of the table the contrary to that which I counselled when I stood upon the other; but my sentiments are magnanimous, my aim is heroic, and, appealing to posterity, I care neither for your cheers nor your taunts.’ But, sir, we must ask ourselves—as members of the House of Commons, as the subjects of a popular government, we must ask ourselves—what were the means, what the machinery, by which the right honourable gentleman acquired his position—how did he obtain power over his supporters, and how dares he treat them with contempt and disdain? Sir, the right honourable gentleman has supported a different policy for a number of years. Well do we remember on this side of the House—perhaps not without a blush—well do we remember the efforts which we made to raise him to the bench on which he now sits. Who does not remember the ‘sacred cause of

protection'—the cause for which sovereigns were thwarted—parliaments dissolved—and a nation taken in! Delightful, indeed, to have the right honourable gentleman entering into all his confidential details, when, to use his courtly language, he 'called' upon his sovereign. Sir, he called on his sovereign; but would his sovereign have called on the right honourable baronet, if, in 1841, he had not placed himself, as he said, at the head of the gentlemen of England? that well-known position, to be preferred even to the confidence of sovereigns and of courts. It is all very well for the right honourable baronet to take this highflying course; but I think myself—I say it with great respect for gentlemen on this side of the House, and gentlemen on the other—I say it without any wish to achieve a party triumph, for I believe I belong to a party which can triumph no more; for we have nothing left on our side except the constituencies which we have not betrayed; but I do say, that my conception of a great statesman, is of one who represents a great idea—an idea which may lead him to power—an idea with which he may identify himself—an idea which he may develop—an idea which he may and can impress on the mind and conscience of a nation. That, sir, is my notion of what makes a man a great statesman. I do not care whether he be a manufacturer, or a manufacturer's son; that is a grand—that is, indeed, an heroic position. But I care not what may be the position of a man who never originates an idea—a watcher of the atmosphere—a man who, as he says, takes his observations, and when he finds the wind in a certain quarter, trims to suit it. Such a person may be a powerful minister, but he is no more a great statesman, than the man who gets up behind a carriage is a great whip. Both are disciples of progress. Both, perhaps, may get a good place; but how far the original momentum is indebted to their

powers, and how far their guiding prudence regulates the lash or the rein, it is not necessary for me to notice."

Alluding to Sir Robert Peel's description of himself, he said :—

"Nursed in the House of Commons, entertaining no idea but that of parliamentary success, if you wish to touch him to the quick, you must touch him on the state of the poll. The moment that he heard of South Lancashire being lost—by means respecting which I will not, at this moment, say anything—the moment he heard that Yorkshire was in danger—the right honourable baronet—the minister who has served four sovereigns—the gentleman who has had the question of protection before his official mind in every shape which ingenuity could devise, during his parliamentary career of a quarter of a century—this gentleman suddenly finds that the arguments in favour of protection to native industry are not, after all, so cogent as he once thought them—he discovers that the principle of protection cannot be supported; and, having arrived at this conclusion, then, with all the debating dexterity—with all the parliamentary adroitness he possesses, he comes forward—he has the sublime audacity to come forward and confess that, at his ripe age, he is convinced by arguments, the very same we have heard for the last thirty years; and, greater triumph still, he has the parliamentary tact to convince most of his supporters that he is sincere. Sir, I give the right honourable gentleman full credit—I admire his parliamentary powers—I admit them—I appreciate them; but it is really too much for a minister who has led such a career—who offers us such arguments—who tells us in effect, that it is not intellect which should govern—that it is not great and true ideas which should govern; but that it is the state of the registration, and the accident of the poll; it is, I repeat, too much

for such a man to come forward and talk to us in high-pitched language about his lofty spirit—about his determination never to be the tool of those, of whom, when in opposition, he was, by the by, the very ready counsellor—to come forward and say that he is but thinking of posterity—that he is touched by the love of fame, the noblest of all aspirations, and which alone constitutes the highest reward for his great toils. What an advantage to a country to be governed by a minister who thinks only of posterity! The right honourable gentleman has before assured us, that he and his colleagues are only thinking of ‘the future.’ Who can doubt it? Look at them. Throw your eyes over the Treasury Bench. See stamped on each ingenuous front—‘The last infirmity of a noble mind.’ They are all of them, as Spencer says, ‘imps of fame.’ They are just the men in the House you would fix upon as thinking only of posterity. The only thing is, when one looks at them, seeing of what they are composed, one is hardly certain whether ‘the future’ of which they are thinking is indeed posterity, or only the coming quarter-day! I should like to know what posterity may think of a cabinet which resigns office because it cannot support a policy, and accepts office for the same reason. In the history of England—in the history of parties, I defy any man—I defy even the right honourable member for Edinburgh, with his disciplined memory and cultivated mind—I defy any man learned in British history, to adduce me a case parallel to this. And what is to be the result? If ‘coming events cast their shadows before,’ I suppose no gentleman in a sane state of mind can doubt it. We resisted the moderate proposal of the Whigs. We rejected it, confiding in the experience of that practised individual—the gentleman who has served four sovereigns. We were blind enough to believe, that a gentleman of such great ability—of such long experience—who had had such immense advan-

tages, could not make very gross and palpable blunders. We accepted him for a leader, to accomplish the triumph of protection ; and now we are to attend the catastrophe of protection. Of course the Whigs will be the chief mourners. They cannot but weep for their innocent, although it was an abortion ; but ours was a fine child. Who can forget how its nurse dandled it, fondled it ? What a charming babe ! Delicious little thing ! so thriving ! Did you ever see such a beauty for its years ? This was the tone—the innocent prattle. And then the nurse, in a fit of patriotic frenzy, dashes its brains out, and comes down to give master and mistress an account of this terrible murder. The nurse, too, a person of very orderly demeanour, not given to drink, and never showing any emotion, except of late, when kicking against protection. How ungrateful ! For, God knows, we were more than obedient—we were servile. But how is it now ? The most valuable colleague of the right honourable gentleman—I say so for good reasons—has protested against him. Lord Stanley, who, when the right honourable baronet was in opposition, was the great adhesion that was to make Conservative principles triumphant ; he, if I have not been misinformed by some one too zealous to hear aright, for I have not had the advantage of hearing that noble lord's speech to-night in another place—but I am told that that noble lord has stated, that he quitted the ministry because he found they were leaving the principles upon which they obtained the confidence of parliament. It is very well to come to us with stories about his sovereign, and about posterity, but where would the right honourable baronet have been, if the House of Commons had not existed ? Now, I say it is utterly impossible to carry on your parliamentary constitution, except by political parties. I say there must be distinct principles, as lines of conduct, adopted by public men. Away with your talk about going down to Windsor,

and finding that Lord John this, or Lord William that, cannot form a ministry, and saying, 'Then I must form one, and bring all my colleagues to support measures that they entirely disapprove.' Is that the constitution that governs England? If the constitution that govcrns England, be a constitution that makes men recommend that of which they do not approve, then the sooner we get rid of this constitution the better. It comes to that; and the noble lord opposite, the member for London, who has a respect for the parliamentary constitution, and who represents a party that are nothing if they do not respect a parliamentary constitution, ought to resist such a vulgar, ignoble innovation. I can understand an absolute sovereign, in a country of high civilization, governing through a council of state selected by her arbitrary but intelligent will, from the ablest men of the country; but we have a parliamentary constitution. It may have committed great wrongs—undoubtedly it has achieved immense and magnificent results; but this House of Commons still forms a part of the constitution, though how degraded and demoralized it may become, if the principles we have heard to-night are to be aeknowledged, I confess I cannot tell."

Lord Northland and Colonel Sibthorp joined in the reprobation of Sir Robert Pcel; but after Disraeli's philippic, the House was too impatient to hear more, and the address was adopted without a division.

The question of Free Trade might be said to stand in the same position as the Reform bill, when introduced by Lord John Russell. It was at once a popular and a ministerial proposition; but it was opposed by the whole weight of the landed interest, and the great body of the aristocracy. A subtle politician, well known by his contributions to the *Quarterly Review*, has declared that any great popular measure, once adopted by a ministry, may be delayed, modified, or muti-

lated, but cannot ultimately be averted. Sir Robert Peel counted with justice on popular enthusiasm and determination, as a great element in his success. He therefore resolved to develop his plan at the earliest possible moment, feeling well assured that the many speakers and writers who had been trained in sound economic principles, under the League, would explain the value of his Tariff to the public, and effectually overturn any fallacies by which the Protectionists might endeavour to render the proposed change unpopular. I was the first time in his life that he unequivocally threw himself upon the press and the people; from both he received the most disinterested support: and had he, at the time, expressed a wish to retain office on popular principles, and with popular colleagues, the press and the people would have secured his position as premier, in defiance of parliamentary majorities.

On the 27th of January, the House was crowded at a very early hour, to hear the ministerial changes in the Tariff. Several of the leading members of the House of Peers were present, some of the foreign ambassadors also attended, and most conspicuous among the visitors was Prince Albert, whose attendance was supposed to intimate that the Premier's policy had the cordial approbation of the Queen. Sir Robert Peel, having previously moved that the House should resolve itself into a committee of the whole House, on the Customs and Corn-importation acts, and that the passages of her Majesty's speech, relating to these topics, (quoted in the commencement of this chapter,) should be read, proceeded with great minuteness to explain all the reductions he proposed in the import duties, and the reasons for each; dwelling, of course, at greatest length on the great present reduction and prospective abolition of the duties imposed on the importation of corn. In conclusion, he said—

“I trust that this improved intercourse with foreign

countries will constitute a new bond of peace ; and that it will control the passions of those European Governments who still indulge themselves in the visions of war. I do hope that the friends and lovers of peace between nations, will derive material strength from the example which I have advised, by remitting the impediments to commercial intercourse. But observe, if that be the effect, I think in all probability, that the continuance of permanent peace will expose us to more extensive and more formidable competition with foreign countries with respect to manufactures. During war we commanded the supply of nations. Peace has introduced not only new consumers, but also formidable manufacturing interests.

" In order that we may retain our pre-eminence, it is of the greatest importance that we neglect no opportunity of securing to ourselves those advantages by which that pre-eminence can be alone secured. Sir, I firmly believe that abundance and cheapness of provisions is one of the constituents by which the continuance of manufacturing and commercial pre-eminence may be maintained. You may say the object of these observations is to flatter the love of gain and administer merely to the desire of accumulating money. I advise this measure on no such ground. I believe that the accumulation of wealth, that is, the increase of capital, is a main element, or at least one of the chief means by which we can retain the cminence we have so long possessed. But I have attempted to show that abundance of provisions, and security (which is the main thing) for continued abundance, not only contributes to the accumulation of wealth, but that it is directly conducive to the alleviation of public burdens, by increasing the revenue ; to the alleviation of local burdens, by diminishing crimes ; but above all, that it is conducive to the spread of morality, by diminishing those temptations to crime which arise from distress and poverty. I ask you

therefore, to give your consent to this measure, not upon any narrow view that its principle is connected with the accumulation of wealth. I ask you to give your consent to this measure on far higher principles; on the principle that, encumbered as we are by heavy taxes; that, solicitous as we are to provide for the public credit, we feel the true source of increased revenue to be increased comfort, and the unseen voluntary taxation which arises from increased consumption. I ask you to consent to this upon proof advanced to you, that abundance and cheapness lead to diminished crime and increased morality. I could adduce to you many instances of the beneficial effects of this comparative cheapness. It is said, there is no danger of scarcity, and why then should we interfere? Now, what is scarcity? It is a relative term. That which is not scarcity to us may be scarcity to others. But remember this, the lapse of three years of abundance is an important era in the history of a country. Three years of abundance and comparative cheapness of provisions have materially altered the circumstances and feelings of the people. That which was not then a denial of comforts, though they might almost amount to necessities, would be felt severely now. There would be much more real suffering felt in 1846, after the enjoyment of three years of comparative abundance, by being now put upon a short allowance, than there would have been in 1842. Then I advise you not to check the genial growth of that prosperity we have now enjoyed for three years."

The debate on the ministerial propositions was protracted through twelve tedious nights. Sir Robert Peel spoke on the sixth of these, and we regret that we can only make one extract from his eloquent and statesmanlike oration :

"This night is to decide between the policy of continued relaxation of restriction, or the return to restraint and prohibition. This night, you will select the motto which is to

indicate the commercial policy of England. Shall it be 'Advance,' or 'Recede?' Which is the fitter motto for this great empire? Survey our position, consider the advantage which God and nature have given us, and the destiny for which we were intended. We stand on the confines of Western Europe, the chief connecting link between the Old World and the New. The discoveries of science, the improvement of navigation, have brought us within ten days of St. Petersburg, and will soon bring us within ten days of New York. We have an extent of coast greater in proportion to our population, and the area of our land, than any other great nation, securing to us maritime strength and superiority. Iron and coal, the sinews of manufacture, give us advantages over every rival in the great competition of industry. Our capital far exceeds that which they can command. In ingenuity, in skill, in energy, we are inferior to none. Our national character; the free institutions under which we live; the liberty of thought and action; an unshackled press, spreading the knowledge of every discovery, and of every advance in science; combine with our natural and physical advantages, to place us at the head of those nations which profit by the free interchange of their products. And is this the country to shrink from competition? Is this the country to adopt a retrograde policy? Is this the country which can only flourish in the sickly atmosphere of prohibition? Is this the country to stand shivering on the brink of exposure to the healthful breezes of competition? Choose your motto, 'Advance' or 'Recede.' Many countries are watching with anxiety the selection you may make. Determine for 'Advance' and it will be the watchword which will animate and encourage in every state the friends of liberal commercial policy. Sardinia has taken the lead: Naples is relaxing her protective duties, and favouring British produce: Prussia is shaken in her adherence to

restriction: the Government of France will be strengthened; and backed by the intelligence of the reflecting, and by conviction of the real welfare of the great body of the community, will, perhaps, ultimately prevail over the self-interest of the commercial and manufacturing aristocracy, which now predominates in her Chambers. Can you doubt that the United States will soon relax her hostile tariff, and that the friends of a freer commercial intercourse—the friends of peace between the two countries—will hail with satisfaction the example of England ?

“This night then—if on this night the debate shall close—you will have to decide, what are the principles by which your commercial policy is to be regulated. Most earnestly, from a deep conviction founded not upon the limited experience of three years alone, but upon the experience of the results of every relaxation of restriction and prohibition, I counsel you to set the example of liberality to other countries. Act thus, and it will be in perfect consistency with the course you have hitherto taken :—Act thus, and you will provide an additional guarantee for the continued contentment and happiness, and well-being of the great body of the people :—Act thus, and you will have done whatever human sagacity can do for the promotion of commercial prosperity.

“You may fail. Your precautions may be unavailing. They may give no certain assurance that mercantile and manufacturing prosperity will continue without interruption. It seems to be incident to great prosperity that there shall be a reverse; that the time of depression shall follow the season of excitement and success. That time of depression must perhaps return ; and its return may be coincident with scarcity caused by unfavourable seasons. Gloomy winters like those of 1841 and 1842, may again set in. Are those winters effaced from your memory ? From mine they never

can be. Surely, you cannot have forgotten with what earnestness and sincerity you re-echoed the deep feelings of a gracious Queen, when at the opening and at the close of each session, she expressed the warmest sympathy with the suffering of the people, and the warmest admiration of their heroic fortitude.

“These sad years may recur. ‘The years of plenteousness may have ended,’ and ‘The years of dearth may have come;’ and again you may have to offer the unavailing expressions of sympathy, and the urgent exhortations to patient resignation. Commune with your own hearts, and answer me this question:—will your assurances of sympathy be less consolatory—will your exhortations to patience be less impressive—if with your willing consent the Corn Laws shall have ceased to exist? Will it be no satisfaction to you to reflect that by your own act you have been relieved from the grievous responsibility of regulating the supply of food? Will you not then cherish with delight the reflection, that, in this the present hour of comparative prosperity, yielding to no clamour, impelled by no fear—except, indeed, that provident fear, which is the mother of safety—you had anticipated the evil day, and, long before its advent, had trampled on every impediment to the Creator’s bounty?

“When you are again exhorting a suffering people to fortitude under their privations; when you are telling them, ‘These are the chastenings of an all-wise and merciful Providence, sent for some insurmountable, but just and beneficent purpose; it may be to humble our pride, or to punish our unfaithfulness, or to impress us with the sense of our own nothingness and dependence on His mercy;’ when you are thus addressing your suffering fellow-subjects, and encouraging them to bear without repining the dispensations of Providence, may God grant that by your decision on this night, you may have laid in store for yourselves, the consolation of

reflecting, that such calamities, are, in truth, dispensations of Providence ; that they have not been caused, they have not been aggravated by the laws of man restricting in the hour of scarcity, the supply of food."

Before this protracted debate reached its close, an incident occurred of some interest and advantage to the premier. In a former chapter we have mentioned, that Sir Robert Peel, in the heat of debate, rather too directly charged Mr. Cobden, with being an instigator of assassination, and that his subsequent retraction of so odious a charge was made so indistinctly, that he seemed desirous to leave it fixed as an imputation against the leader of the Anti-Corn Law League. Mr. Disraeli, while defending Mr. Ferrand from the charge of hazarding hasty and unfounded charges against all from whom he differed, referred to Sir Robert Peel's imputation on Cobden as an exculpatory parallel. The premier took advantage of the opportunity, to withdraw his imputation on Cobden, in the most explicit and handsome terms, while Cobden on his part expressed regret for having spoken too harshly of Peel, while smarting under the imputation of a most odious and groundless charge.

It is utterly impossible to give anything like an abstract of this long and tedious, though important debate. Not a single new argument for or against the Corn Laws was advanced from the beginning to the end of it ; and with the general arguments on the subject all must be sufficiently familiar, who have read the preceding chapters of this volume. Twelve nights, however, did not satisfy the Protectionist orators, though they were defeated by the decisive majority of ninety-one. They took every fair and unfair opportunity of raising incidental debates, and venting their personal rancour on the premier. The same cuckoo-cry ran through the whole of these multiplied and interminable orations ; they all amounted to the same assertion, that no

confidence could be reposed in the right honourable baronet, on account of his gross and repeated inconsistencies. He was menaced with expulsion from office, though he had declared, from the very outset, that he regarded his removal from office as the inevitable result of the course of policy which he had adopted. He was told that his political existence was at an end ; that he never more could be trusted by any party ; and that the general voice of the people of England branded him as an apostate. Sir Robert Peel endured these attacks with exemplary patience ; but he sometimes turned on his pursuers, and castigated them with such replies as the one which we shall quote :—

"I am not surprised to hear honourable members predict that my tenure of power is short. But let us pass this measure, and while it is in progress let me request of you to suspend your indignation. This measure being once passed, you on this side, and on that side of the House, may adopt whatever measures you think proper for the purpose of terminating my political existence. I assure you, I deplore the loss of your confidence much more than I shall deplore the loss of political power. The accusations which you prefer against me are, on this account, harmless, because I feel that they are unjust. Every man has within his own bosom and conscience the scales which determine the real weight of reproach ; and if I had acted from any corrupt or unworthy motives, one-tenth part of the accusations you have levelled against me would have been fatal to my peace and my existence. You may think that we took too great precautions against Irish famine in the month of November. You are mistaken. Events will prove that those precautions were not superfluous ; but even if they had been, as our motive was to rescue a whole people from the calamity of possible famine, and consequent disease, I should be easy under the accusation. I do not say whether this measure will be effec-

tual for that, or not. I speak only of the motive. What weight would your accusation have then, even if the precautions be superfluous? I, with the information we had, and the prospects which were before us, repel the accusation, that we took superfluous precautions; and I will reply, as Mr. Burke did, when labouring under similar obloquy, and in circumstances not dissimilar, ‘In every accident in life, in pain, in sickness, in depression, in distress, I called to mind that accusation, and was comforted.’ No, never—no reproach will attach to me, even if it be proved that our precautions were superfluous. Before the month of July, it will be established to the conviction of every man, that the precautions we took were not superfluous, and that our motives were not impure. I am not speaking of a temporary measure; I am not speaking of a permanent measure. When I do fall, I shall have the satisfaction of reflecting, that I do not fall because I have shown subservience to a party. I shall not fall because I preferred the interests of party to the general interests of the community; and I shall carry with me the satisfaction of reflecting, that during the course of my official career, my object has been to mitigate monopoly, to increase the demand for industry, to remove the restrictions upon commerce, to equalize the burden of taxation, and to ameliorate the condition of those who labour.”

It was not until the 11th of May that the Corn bill reached its final stage—the third reading. This led to a debate, which continued three nights; after which, at four o’clock on the morning of the 16th of May, it was carried by a majority of ninety-eight. The resistance to the bill in the House of Lords was of a far more moderate character than had been anticipated. Lord Stanley headed the opposition, and assailed his late colleagues with some bitterness; but when he passed from personality to argument, he became evidently conscious of his own weakness, and was as tame at

the conclusion of his speech, as he had been vehement in the beginning. In fact, the Duke of Wellington had placed the common sense of the matter before their lordships, in his own plain, unaffected, and characteristic way; he virtually told the peers that it would be better for them to pass the measure with a good grace, than to have it extorted from them by the united force of the two other branches of the legislature. The memory of the Reform bill was too strongly fixed in the minds of his hearers, to allow of their again committing themselves to a struggle between the crown and the people. Some show of resistance was made at the second reading, but the final stage of the bill was allowed to pass without debate or division. By a singular coincidence, the announcement of the success of the measure in the House of Lords was made in the Commons on the very night of the division which compelled Sir Robert Peel's ministry to resign. The events which led to this result belong to another and very different course of ministerial policy, and must therefore be discussed in another chapter.

## CHAPTER XI.

RESIGNATION OF SIR ROBERT PEEL'S ADMINISTRATION  
—AND CONCLUSION.

THE vehement indignation of the Protectionists against Sir Robert Peel, whom they accused of having betrayed and destroyed the party by which he had been elevated to power, far from abating as the session advanced, seemed daily to increase in intensity and activity. He only continued in office until the aid of the Whigs would be no longer required for the safety of those great measures of Free Trade, with which he had linked his name and reputation, and on which he relied for fame with posterity. Neither was he anxious to retain power: robust as his health had hitherto been, the fatigues of office, and the harassing attacks which he had to endure night after night, had begun to make visible inroads on his constitution; his eye was less bright, and his step less firm, though his intellect continued to retain its pristine vigour. But even in debate, there was a perceptible change in his manner; he had, with apparent unconsciousness, acquired a grave and almost melancholy dignity, and had laid aside the bustling energy, the readiness in tart reply, and the sarcastic tone, which had rendered him formidable as a member of opposition. He felt that his remaining duty was to perform a great public service, rather than to gain a great party victory; and he seemed to have resolved not to remain in office, so soon as he found that his powers of being efficiently useful were impaired.

The desires rather than the hopes of the Queen and the country were, that parties should be reconstructed on a new basis, and that Sir Robert Peel and Lord John Russell should place themselves at the head of all who were anxious for social improvement and political progress. But to such a fusion many great difficulties were opposed: past opportunities for a coalition had been neglected; the Whigs believed that the Melbourne administration had not been treated with candour or fairness, and they would have viewed with some distrust the change of their censorious critic into an active colleague; furthermore, they believed that their party alone could restore tranquillity to Ireland, and they feared that Sir Robert Peel's presence would interfere with this, the darling object of their honourable ambition. On the other hand, Sir Robert Peel longed for retirement: of wealth he had enough; of fame he had acquired a sufficiency to satisfy any ordinary ambition; and as premier he had possessed a larger share of power and influence than any minister since the days of Pitt. But he had not enjoyed that, for which, even in the proudest moments of gratified ambition, he most eagerly thirsted for—the quietude of domestic life in the centre of an amiable family.

Even without a formal coalition with the Whigs, Sir Robert Peel might have retained office, had he resolved on forming an entirely new party based on the principles of Free Trade, had he hazarded the bold experiment of a dissolution of parliament, and an appeal to the country. But success in this experiment would have involved the necessity of reconstructing the cabinet, of choosing new colleagues, and adopting new principles. He would have owed his success to a movement of the middle classes, breaking through and overturning all old aristocratic combinations. Such a movement must have involved political consequences immediate and remote, the extent of which no human fore-

sight could ascertain, and no experience could enable a statesman to predict.

“A wide unbounded prospect lay before him,  
But shadows, clouds, and darkness rested on it.”

We cannot be surprised that, like Cato, he exclaimed—

“Here will I hold.”

If he was indebted for power to a successful movement of the middle classes, he must in turn have lent all his aid to those classes, for the improving and securing of their victory. This would have involved an extension of the suffrage; probably vote by ballot, and a shortening of the duration of parliaments; but, most certainly, a re-distribution of the elective franchise, with some definite relation to the proportions of the population. In fact, Sir Robert Peel, the great opponent of the first Reform Bill, would have had to introduce a second, far surpassing the former in its popular and democratic tendencies.

Nor was this all; during the discussion on the Corn-Laws the inequitable distribution of the public burdens had more than once been powerfully discussed in the League meetings. There was a growing conviction that landed property had been unfairly exempted from its due share of taxation, and that far too large a proportion had been thrown on commerce, trade, and industry. A minister of the middle classes must have been prepared to revise the entire system of taxation, and to have attempted a re-adjustment, certain to have exasperated many parties, and to have given perfect satisfaction to none. We feel thoroughly convinced that Sir Robert Peel ought not to have placed himself in such a position, unless he was prepared to encounter the hazard, and undertake the responsibility, of giving England a new constitution.

We shared the disappointment which was generally felt, when it became manifest that the consummation of the

greatest boon which the premier could confer on the country, would also be the close of his political existence as a minister; but after coolly reflecting on all the circumstances, we could not blame, however much we regretted, his determination. What we do regret and blame is, the choice of the battle-field on which he was to be defeated. It would have been fortunate for the country if he had not offered, and if his successors had not accepted, the Irish Arms act, for what after all was but a formal struggle.

The hopes of the Irish peasants had been stimulated to the verge of insanity in 1843; the following year was one of sinking disappointment; and this morbid feeling, towards the close of 1845, assumed the form of desperation, under the pressure of scarcity. The great increase in the number of offences against the public peace was frightful: from 1,495 in 1844, they had risen to 3,642 in 1845, and there seemed no prospect of any improvement. A Coercion bill, to enable the government to proclaim any district in which crime prevailed, and to send thither a constabulary force, to be supported at the expense of the district, was introduced into the Upper House, by the Earl of St. Germains; and some stringent clauses were added, prohibiting the possession of firearms, and quitting the dwelling-house between sunset and sunrise. This bill passed through the House of Lords with little opposition; one trifling amendment, moved by Earl Grey, found only seven supporters; no division was taken in any other stage of the measure.

In the House of Commons the bill met a very different reception; it encountered from the outset the most determined opposition. A great struggle was made to prevent its being read even a first time. On the 30th of March, Sir James Graham moved the postponement of the other orders of the day, in order that he might bring on his motion for the first reading of the bill for the protection of life in

Ireland. Sir W. Somerville moved a direct negative on this proposal, and was seconded by Mr. W. S. O'Brien. A sharp, skirmishing debate ensued, and at length a majority decided that Sir James Graham should be allowed to proceed.

Sir James Graham began by taking credit for the conciliatory course which the government had pursued in Ireland, instancing the Catholic Bequests' act, the increase of the grant to Maynooth, the increase of the grant for national education, the establishment of the provincial colleges, and the Devon commission. He then stated that the disturbances in Ireland were topical; and that, but for the condition of five counties—Tipperary, Clare, Roscommon, Limerick, and Leitrim—he would not have called upon the House to pass any measure of coercion or restriction. He then described, at great length, the progress of agrarian and insurrectionary crime in these counties, and concluded by imploring gentlemen “as they loved Ireland—as they abhorred outrage and crime—not to oppose the progress of the bill.” This appeal met no friendly response; the debate on this, the very first stage of the measure, was protracted through five nights, and the division did not take place before the 1st of May.

The increasing distress of the Irish peasantry, consequent on the destruction of the potato crop, was a prominent subject in this debate; and many members urged upon the government, the expediency of adopting that perilous experiment, which has since led to such terrible results in France, namely, that the state should take upon itself the task of employing and feeding the people. The necessity of undertaking this task was very strongly urged by Mr. E. B. Roehe, one of the members for the county of Cork: Sir Robert Peel answered him, by pointing out the economic dangers which such a course involved:

“We have been charged with contenting ourselves with

mere fine-spun speeches and soft words; but the honourable gentleman, and those who think with him, might do us the justice to reflect that government may feel extreme difficulty in adopting measures which may have a tendency to aggravate, rather than relieve, the distresses of that country. I agree with him, that if by the interference of the government, we could rescue the people of Ireland from their present sufferings, no considerations of a pecuniary nature ought to prevent our adopting immediate and decisive measures for that purpose. But where interference is so unusual, so contrary to all sound principle, let us take care that our interference, though well intended, does not ultimately add to this mischief. I assure the honourable member, that the utmost precaution is necessary — and his speech affords the strongest evidence of it—lest by our very liberality, professing to support the people, we aggravate the evil."

It was proposed by Mr. Roche, that the government should purchase a sufficient stock of Indian meal, and retail it at a moderate price to the peasants. But it is obvious that the moment in which the government appeared in the market as a great purchaser, prices would instantly rise, and all private trade would be at an end; for no private merchant would buy and bring in Indian corn, if he were obliged to enter into competition with a government, which, heedless of profit or loss, would buy at the dearest rate, and sell at the cheapest. The inevitable consequence would be, that the government should undertake the duty of feeding *all* classes, and be the only corn-merchant in the kingdom. To execute such a task would be impossible, and the mere attempt would have produced such commercial derangements as to prevent the country from receiving supplies by the natural and ordinary course of trade.

Having expounded this principle, which is based not merely on the immutable laws of political economy, but on the

plainest dictates of common sense, with a clearness and precision which even Irish prejudice could hardly resist, Sir Robert Peel said, in conclusion, "Her Majesty's government may not have taken the best measures for the relief of Irish distress; but I can state, that we have painfully considered the subject, and have spared no labour by day or by night. It may be that the measures which we have taken, may not be effectual for the purpose of meeting that distress; but I can assure honourable gentlemen, that indifference to the state of the Irish people cannot fairly be laid to our charge—that it is not from any fear of incurring the expense, that has deterred us from going further, and from taking all the measures he thinks we might adopt; but it is a fear of too great an intervention with the ordinary course of commerce, and of thus ultimately aggravating the evil which we meant to remove. It is this consideration alone which has prevented us from adopting those measures which the honourable gentleman thinks might have been more decisive and effectual."

On the sixth night of the debate, Sir Robert Peel again addressed the House, in a very touching and effective speech. Among the many imputations from which he had to exculpate himself, was a charge of having introduced this measure of coercion, as a means of escaping from the proposed change in the Corn-Laws; to this he replied—"Sir, I think I need hardly refer to the injurious surmise which I have heard thrown out, that her Majesty's government had become indifferent to the progress of the Corn-bill, and that they had interposed this discussion, or rather the first reading of another measure, with a view to the defeat of that bill. I know that honourable gentlemen have not said so for themselves, but they have said, in the course of this discussion, that such an impression exists on the part of the public. Sir, I shall be prepared to give whatever proof may be required,

of the sincerity of my convictions on the subject of the Corn-bill. It is sufficient for me now to state, that the progress of the discussion, the lapse of time and intervening events, have more strongly confirmed in me the feeling which I expressed, when I proposed the permanent and final adjustment of this question. Sir, I will not deny that even during these debates, my opinions on that subject have undergone a change; but it is this change—that restrictions, which I at first believed to be *impolitic*, I now believe to be *unjust*, and consequently a sense of that injustice precludes any compromise on my part.”

In reference to a remark made by Mr. M’Carthy, the member for Cork, that “the premier had no other disposition but that of kindness towards the people of Ireland, but that his good wishes were overruled by some malign influence,” Sir Robert Peel said :—

“ I do assure the honourable member, that he does me but justice in attributing to me the most sincere interest in that part of her Majesty’s dominions; but that he does me injustice in supposing that any such influence could overrule my sense of duty. If I did not believe that a positive necessity required some such measure to give protection to life in Ireland, and to prevent social disorganization, and the deterioration (consequent on frequent crimes being unpunished) of the national character, no consideration would have induced me, or those with whom I act, to have been a party to this measure.”

He then undertook to establish the three following propositions :—

First—“ That there prevailed in Ireland, both as to the frequency of crime, but, above all, as to the character and nature of the offences committed, a necessity for some extraordinary measure.

Sceondly—" That all the resources of the ordinary law had been exhausted, and that government had done every-thing possible with the instruments whieh the constitution placed in its hands for the preservation of life and the maintenance of order.

And thirdly—" That there was a rational ground for hoping and believing that the particular measure proposed, which was at variance with the established principles of law, was likely to be effectual to the purposes for which it was to be applied."

Having established these propositions, he said, in conclusion :—

" It is now, I think, five weeks since this measure was introduced ; I have stated the reasons whieh induced the government to interpose it before other measures were proceeded with ; and I do hope, considering the long discussion, the full disscussion, whieh has taken place upon it, that the representatives of Ireland will now feel that they have done their duty, and will permit the sense of the House to be taken upon this preliminary stage. I wish to avoid a word whieh could pique them into a further continuance of this debate ; I find no fault with them. I do not mean to question the exercise of their discretion ; but I do hope, considering that this is but a preliminary disscussion, and considering what measures are pending of the utmost importance to Ireland, that they will yield to that which I believe is the prevailing opinion on all sides of the House,—the prevailing sentiments of those who would most cordially concur with them in resisting the further progress of this bill,—that they will feel that they have performed their duty to their country, and will at length permit the sense of the House to be taken on this preliminary stage of the bill."

The debate was continued over another night, and finally the first reading was carried by a majority of 149; the ayes being 274, and the noes 125.

The debate on the second reading did not take place until the 8th of June; it commenced by Sir William Somerville moving as an amendment, that the bill should be read a second time that day six months. So little interest was at first felt in the debate, that on two occasions the House was nearly counted out; but this apathy gave place to the most intense excitement, when it was announced that Lord George Bentinck and the Protectionists had resolved to oppose the measure, for the express purpose of turning out the ministry. Lord George Bentinck announced this determination in a most furious invective, personally directed against Sir Robert Peel, and involving the gravest charges against him both as a minister and a man. His first charge was, that they proposed the measure without any sincere intention of carrying it into a law. On this subject he said:—

“ When I call to mind that the bill came down to this House on the 13th of March—that it was not read a first time until the 1st of May, and that since then nearly six weeks have elapsed before her Majesty’s ministers attempted to take any step to forward this measure—when I recollect that since the Easter holidays the government has allotted no government-night for resuming the adjourned debate upon the first reading of the bill, which stood upon the order-book of the House, and that on one occasion they permitted no House to be made—when I recollect, that since the bill was read a first time, they have permitted four government-nights to be occupied with different business, other than the Corn and Tariff bills, that they suffered four nights, which were not government-nights, to be wasted—I think, sir, after these things, it must be admitted

on all hands, that no great desire, no great earnestness, no great sincerity, has been shown by her Majesty's ministers to carry this measure into a law. . . When the ministers introduced this measure, you were told it was brought forward as a temporary measure for a temporary emergency; but notwithstanding the emergency, the measure has been postponed from January to the middle of June."

The personal attack upon Sir Robert Peel was still more bitter. "We used," said Lord George, "to be told by the right honourable baronet, that he would not consent to be a minister on sufferance: but I think he must be blinded indeed by the flattery of those around him, if he has not learnt that he is now a minister on sufferance, tossed from one side to the other, sometimes depending on honourable gentlemen opposite, sometimes depending on my friends around me, supported by none but his forty paid janizaries, and some seventy other renegades, one-half of whom, while they support him, express their shame at doing so. When, I say, this is the state of the government, it is high time for us to speak out on this measure, and in this debate to mark our sense of their conduct by voting against them. Therefore, though the right honourable baronet may be supported by his forty paid janizaries and his seventy renegades, I ask him if he has not lost the confidence of every honest man in the House, and of every honest and honourable-minded man out of the House? We are told now—we hear from the right honourable baronet himself—that he thinks there is nothing humiliating in the course which he has pursued—that it would have been base and dishonest in him, and inconsistent with his duty to his sovereign, if he had concealed his opinions after he had changed them: but I have lived long enough, I am sorry to say, to remember, and to remember with

sorrow—with deep and heart-felt sorrow—the time when the right honourable baronet chased and hunted an illustrious relative of mine to death; and when he stated that he could not support his ministry because a leading member of it, though he had changed no opinion, yet from his position was likely to forward the question of Catholic Emancipation: that was the conduct of the right honourable baronet in 1827; but in 1829 the right honourable baronet told the House that he had changed his opinions on that subject in 1825, and had communicated that change of opinion to the Earl of Liverpool. That, however, did not prevent the right honourable baronet from getting up in 1827, in his place, and stating that he had severed himself from Mr. Canning's government, because he could not support a government of which the chief minister was then favourable to the measure which the right honourable baronet had approved of two years before. If therefore the right honourable baronet says it is base and dishonest, and inconsistent with his duty to his sovereign, to continue to maintain opinions after he has changed them, does not the right honourable baronet, I say, stand convicted on his own verdict of base and dishonest conduct, and conduct inconsistent with his duty to his sovereign?"

In an earlier part of this work we have minutely examined all the circumstances connected with the imputed treachery of Peel to Canning, and have shown that the gravest charges founded upon it, were either misrepresentations or gross exaggerations. But the reference made to them by Lord George Bentinck, produced a profound impression upon the House, which was not a little deepened by Sir Robert Peel's allowing the debate to be adjourned, without making a reply. During the four days that intervened between Lord George Bentinck's attack, and Sir Robert Peel's answer, the subject

was keenly discussed in all the newspapers of the three kingdoms, and in almost every circle of society. Ever since 1829, a vague impression had prevailed that Canning had in some way or other been unfairly treated, and this impression, which we must confess was not wholly unfounded, caused Lord George Bentinck's accusation to be received more implicitly than it deserved. There was one circumstance strongly put by Sir Robert Peel in his reply, which greatly damaged the accuser and the accusation. "I must say," said the right honourable baronet, "that I respect the feelings of any man who feels indignant at the conduct of any one who has 'chased and hunted his relation to death.' I say, I respect his feelings. The noble lord abhors those who attempt to hunt and chase a public man who acts in the performance of his public duty. And I repeat, that for such feelings I have the highest respect. But how comes it, that entertaining those feelings, the first time I ever heard of them was on Monday last? The noble lord has been a member of parliament since 1826. There may have been intermissions, but since 1835 I have been honoured with the noble lord's cordial, and, I must say, his pure and disinterested support. He called me his right honourable friend—he permitted me to be the leader of the party to which he belonged—he saw me united to his own immediate connections and followers; never until Monday last, in June, 1846, did I harbour the suspicion that the noble lord entertained such feelings in respect to me—a man who chased and hunted his relative to death. I repeat, that entertaining these feelings, may be highly honourable, and I should respect the noble lord for entertaining them. They are apart from all political considerations. A lapse of time may change political circumstances, and may compel combinations in politics which are unforeseen in regard to support given to opponents; but if the noble lord really

believed that I hunted and chased his illustrious relative to death, I cannot understand how, without making any public or private intimation to me that he had those feelings, the noble lord would consent to accept me as his leader, and call me his right honourable friend."

Sir Robert Peel then stated all the circumstances of the case, substantially as they have been already published in these volumes, and ended by declaring that "the charge was utterly and entirely destitute of foundation."

The matter did not end here; it was taken up by Mr. Disraeli, who showed that Lord George Bentinck's version of the story, though inconsistent with the report in Hansard, was supported by the evidence of the *Mirror of Parliament*, by a specific assertion made by Sir Edward Knatchbull, and by an article in the *Edinburgh Review*; he further declared that Lord George Bentinck had been a follower of Lord Stanley, and not of Sir Robert Peel. The long episode in the debate which this controversy produced, was one of little interest; the whole case against Sir Robert Peel, rested on the evidence of the *Mirror of Parliament*, or rather of the *Times*, from which the report in the *Mirror* appeared to be taken. On the other hand, the other four morning papers agreed with the report in Hansard, which had been corrected by Sir Robert Peel, and all the collateral evidence went to prove that the communication said to have been made to Lord Liverpool in 1825, could not possibly have taken place.

The most remarkable speech in the adjourned debate was that of Mr. Cobden, who had opposed the measure from the commencement. Assuming the fact that the coalition of the protectionists with the English liberals (including the Whigs) and the Irish members would defeat the government and lead to the dissolution of the ministry, he declared that he and his friends voted against the measure on its own inherent merits, and not from any want of confidence in the

government. He then referred to the singular condition of the three parties that divided the House, in the following terms :—“ We cannot continue with three parties in the House, neither party being able to carry on the government. There must be a fusion of two parties. I see no immediate prospect of an amalgamation between the gentlemen below the gangway, and their late friends on the other side; and I must say that I am very glad it is so. There is nothing which I should regret more, than to see the right honourable baronet forced into an alliance with that rearward party. But there is another alliance, which, I imagine, in some shape or other, must take place here, and which has already taken place in the country. There is no distinction in the country, so far as I am aware, between those who follow the noble lord the member for London, and those who give in their adhesion to the right honourable baronet : (hear.) I do not understand the logical inference to be drawn from that cheer. I do not think it holds out a cheering prospect to the honourable gentlemen below the gangway. But I augur, that if this fusion has taken place out of doors, and the rank-and-file of those who follow these two distinguished leaders, are found mingling in their ranks, and fraternizing with each other throughout the country, there cannot long be a separation between the two chiefs themselves, and the result will be an abandonment of their strife, and a fusion between the two parties in this House. Well, I apprehend that this will give us a government and a majority—which will not be a protection-government at all events. Now I have only to say in contradiction to the noble lord (Lord George Bentinck), that if the right honourable baronet chooses to retire from office in consequence of this vote, he carries with him the esteem and gratitude of a larger number of the population of this empire than ever followed any minister that was ever hurled from power.”

Here Mr. Rashleigh, one of the members for Cornwall, rather rudely interposed, and exclaimed—"Not of the working classes."

Mr. Cobden, rather surprised at the interruption, turned round, and said—"The honourable member for Cornwall says 'not of the working classes.'"

Mr. Rashleigh, in a louder and more agitated voice,— "And I repeat it."

Mr. Cobden, with marked calmness,— "I am sorry the honourable member is so excited in making the declaration; but has he the same expression of opinion to give with regard to the *voting* classes? I think the right honourable baronet has shown great forbearance to honourable members below the gangway, in not having availed himself of the strength he has with the country, and taking them at their word, by appealing to the nation before he abandons office. But should he not do so, I am not misinterpreting the opinion of the people, not only of the electors, but especially of the working classes, when I tender the right honourable baronet in my own name, as I might do in theirs, my heartfelt thanks for the unwearied perseverance, the unswerving firmness, and the great ability, with which he has, during the last six months, conducted one of the most magnificent reforms ever carried in any country, through this House of Commons."

This honest and striking speech closed the debate; everybody knew what the result of the division would be, but no one seemed to look forward to it with pleasure, except the Protectionists; the Liberals, who joined them in the majority that rejected the measure, plainly showed that they shared in the reluctance so ably expressed by Mr. Cobden, and openly declared that, if the question had been taken on a vote of confidence in Sir Robert Peel, they would have been found among his supporters. On a division there appeared,

for the second reading, 219; against it, 292; giving a majority of 73 against the government.

By a curious, and probably not an undesigned coincidence, this division took place on the very night when the bill for the repeal of the Corn Laws passed the House of Lords, so that the same day which brought the great commercial measure of Sir Robert Peel to a successful issue in one House, witnessed the defeat of his government by an anomalous combination of parties in the other. The masters in Chancery, who announced as is usual the decision of the Lords, came in at an interesting point of the debate, and remained below the bar until Mr. Charles Buller, who was in the middle of his speech, had concluded. The announcement of the complete success of Free Trade was received with loud and reiterated cheers, and it was some minutes before the usual order of the House was restored. Ibrahim Pasha was present as a spectator below the bar, and seemed to take a deep interest in the proceedings.

The result of the division had been for some time anticipated, and the retirement of the Conservative administration regarded as an inevitable event, so soon as the great object of their retention of power had been accomplished. It was generally believed, and with truth, that the issue was one which the prime-minister himself contemplated with no dissatisfaction. The intelligence which arrived from America just at this time, announcing the settlement of the Oregon question, and the generally prosperous condition of the trade and finances of the country, rendered the crisis an auspicious one for the retirement of the ministry, and shed a glory, not altogether real, on the close of its career.

The passing of the Corn-bill and the new Tariff excited much public rejoicing in the manufacturing districts of England and Scotland: on the receipt of the news, bells were rung; flags and banners, bearing appropriate inscrip-

tions, were displayed from factories, or carried in procession about the streets ; cannons were fired, and popular exultation displayed in every possible form. Employers gave their workmen a holiday, to enable them to share in the rejoicings.

On the 29th of June, the resignation of the Conservative administration was announced by the Duke of Wellington in the House of Lords, and by Sir Robert Peel in the Commons. The latter delivered a noble and eloquent vindication of his ministerial career, and in reference to the Corn-Laws and Ireland—the former the real, and the latter the ostensible cause of his overthrow—said :

“ We have advised her Majesty to accept our resignation at once, without adopting that alternative to which we might have resorted—namely, recommending to the crown the exercise of its prerogative, and the dissolution of the present parliament. I do not hesitate to avow, speaking with a frankness that I trust will offend no one, that if her Majesty’s government had failed in carrying, in all their integrity, the main measures of commercial policy which it was my duty to recommend, that there is no exertion that I would not have made—no sacrifice that I would not have incurred—in order to ensure the ultimate success of those measures, or at any rate to give the country an opportunity of pronouncing its opinion on the subject. For such a purpose, I should have felt justified in advising dissolution ; because I think the continuance of doubt and uncertainty on such important matters, would have been a greater evil than the resort to a constitutional mode of ascertaining the opinion of the nation. But there has been fortunately no necessity for a dissolution of parliament upon that ground. Those who dissented most strongly from our commercial policy, withdrew all factious and unseemly opposition, and, protesting against our measures, they have finally allowed them to pass. Those measures having thus become the law,

I do not feel that we should be justified, for any subordinate considerations, for the mere interests of government, or party, in advising the exercise of the prerogative to which I have referred, and the dissolution of parliament. I feel very strongly that no administration is justified in advising the exercise of that prerogative, unless there be a reasonable presumption, a strong moral conviction indeed, that after dissolution they would be enabled to administer the affairs of the country through the support of a party sufficiently powerful to carry their measures.

"I do not think a dissolution justifiable for the purpose merely of strengthening a party. The power of dissolution is a great instrument in the hands of the crown; and it would have a tendency to blunt the instrument, if it were employed without grave necessity. If the purpose were to enable the country to decide whether ministers had been justified in proposing the measures of commercial policy brought forward at the beginning of the session, those measures having passed into a law, I do not think such a purpose alone would be a sufficient ground for a dissolution. There ought also to be a strong presumption, that, after a new election, there would be returned to this House a party with strength sufficient to enable the government, by their support, to carry on that system of public policy of which it approved. I do not mean a support founded upon mere temporary sympathy, or a support founded upon concurrence in one great question of domestic policy, however important. We ought not, in my opinion, to dissolve, without a full assurance that we should have the support of a powerful party united with us by accordance in general views and principles of government. In the present state and divisions of party, and after all that has occurred, I do not entertain a confident hope that a dissolution would give us that support. I think, too, that after the excitement that has taken place—

after the stagnation of trade that has necessarily followed our protracted discussions on the Corn-Laws and the Tariff, it is not an advantageous period for a dissolution, but that the country should be allowed an interval of tranquillity and repose. We have, therefore, on these several grounds preferred instant resignation to the alternative of dissolution.

"The question on which we were defeated, was one connected with Ireland. I should, indeed, deeply lament that defeat, if it could be thought that the measure we proposed for the repression of outrage in Ireland was an indication that her Majesty's servants held any opinion in regard of the policy to be pursued towards that country different from that which I declared towards the close of the last session. To the opinions I then avowed—opinions which had practical effect given to them by the measures we proposed—by such measures, for example, as the Charitable Bequests act, and by the vote for the enlarged endowment of the College of Maynooth—I now profess my entire and unqualified adherence. We brought forward the measure against which the House has recently decided, not under belief that resistance to the contagious spread of crime, and a vigorous repression by law of offences disgracing some parts of the country, were in themselves calculated permanently to improve the social condition of Ireland; but we thought that the restoration and maintenance of order were necessary preliminaries to the success of ulterior legislation for the improvement of the condition of the people. The House, however, has decided otherwise, and I am not about to arraign that decision. I only deprecate the inference, that, because we proposed that bill, which some called a measure of coercion, but which we considered a measure necessary for the protection of life, our views in regard to the policy to be pursued towards Ireland have undergone a change. Speaking for

myself, I do not hesitate to avow the opinion, that there ought to be established a complete equality of municipal, civil, and political rights, as between Ireland and Great Britain. By complete equality I do not mean — because I know that is impossible—a technical and literal equality in every particular respect. In these matters, as in matters of more sacred import, it may be that ‘the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life;’ and I speak of the spirit and not of the letter in which our legislation, in regard to franchise and privilege, ought to be conducted. My meaning is, that there should be a real and substantial equality of political and civil rights, so that no person, viewing Ireland with an unbiassed eye, and comparing the civil franchises of Ireland with those of England or of Scotland, shall be able to say with truth, that a different rule has been adopted towards Ireland, and that on account of hostility, or suspicion, or distrust, civil freedom is there curtailed or mutilated. That is what I mean by equality in legislating for Ireland in respect to civil franchise and political rights.

“ With regard to the executive administration in Ireland, I think the favour of the crown ought to be bestowed, and the confidence of the crown reposed, without reference to religious distinctions. It may appear that we have not practically acted on that principle; but it is not because we repudiate it, or deny its justice. When we have taken the opportunity of manifesting confidence in any member of the Roman Catholic body, I cannot say that justice has been done to our motives, nor has the position of the individual accepting a mark of favour from us, been such as to encourage other Roman Catholics to receive similar proofs of confidence. Those who succeed us in the government of Ireland may have better means of carrying that principle into execution; and if they act upon it, and bestow the favour and confidence of the

crown without reference to religious differences, they shall hear no complaint from me on that ground.

"Then, sir, with respect to the general spirit in which our legislation for Ireland should be conducted. Adhering to all the opinions which I have heretofore expressed on the greater and more important points of Irish policy, I am at the same time prepared to co-operate with those who feel the present social condition of the people in respect to the burden of land, and to the relation between landlord and tenant, to be one that deserves our immediate though most cautious consideration. It may be impossible, by legislation, to apply any instant remedy to the state of affairs which unfortunately exists in that country; but even if the benefit be necessarily remote, that very circumstance ought to operate as an additional stimulus to us to apply our minds without delay to the consideration of a subject of equal difficulty and importance. On all those matters connected with the tenure of land, and the relation of landlord and tenant, I would uphold the rights of property. There may be occasionally a seeming temporary advantage in disregarding those rights, but the ultimate and permanent benefit of strictly maintaining them greatly preponderates. The course we have taken during this session of extreme pressure of public business, is a sufficient proof that there has been no disinclination on our part to consider the amendment of the law in respect to the tenure and improvement of landed property in Ireland, nor will there be any disinclination to co-operate in our private capacities with those on whom the public trust committed to us is about to be devolved."

He then entered into an elaborate history of the negotiations with America, and their happy issue. He concluded the most brilliant address ever delivered by a retiring minister in the following words:—

"Sir, I have now executed the task which my public duty

imposed on me. I trust I have said nothing which can lead to the revival on the present occasion of those controversies which I have deprecated. Whatever opinions may be held with regard to the extent of the danger with which we were threatened from the failure in one great article of subsistence, I can say with truth, that her Majesty's government, in proposing those measures of commercial policy which have disentitled them to the confidence of many who heretofore gave them their support, were influenced by no other motive than the desire to consult the interests of this country. Our object was to avert dangers which we thought were imminent, and to terminate a conflict which, according to our belief, would soon place in hostile collision great and powerful classes in this country. The maintenance of power was not a motive for the proposal of these measures ; for as I said before, I had not a doubt, but, whether these measures were accompanied by failure or success, the certain issue must be the termination of the existence of this government. It is, perhaps, advantageous for the public interests that such should be the issue. I admit that the withdrawal of confidence from us by many of our friends was a natural result. When proposals are made, apparently at variance with the course which ministers heretofore pursued, and subjecting them to the charge of inconsistency, it is perhaps advantageous for this country, and for the general character of public men, that the proposal of measures of that kind, under such circumstance, should entail that which is supposed to be the fitting punishment, namely, expulsion from office. I, therefore, do not complain of that expulsion. I am sure it is far preferable to the continuance in office without a full assurance of the confidence of this House. I said before, and I said truly, that in proposing our measures of commercial policy, I had no wish to rob others of the credit justly due to them. I must say, with reference to honourable

gentlemen opposite, as I say with reference to ourselves, that neither of us is the party which is justly entitled to the credit of them. There has been a combination of parties generally opposed to each other, and that combination, and the influence of government, have led to their ultimate success; but the name which ought to be associated with the success of those measures, is not the name of the noble lord, the organ of the party of which he is the leader, nor is it mine. The name which ought to be, and will be, associated with the success of those measures, is the name of one, who, acting, I believe, from pure and disinterested motives, has, with untiring energy, made appeals to our reason, and has enforced those appeals with an eloquence the more to be admired because it was unaffected and unadorned: the name which ought to be chiefly associated with the success of these measures is the name of RICHARD COBDEN.

"Sir, I now close the observations which it has been my duty to address to the House, thanking them sincerely for the favour with which they have listened to me in performing this last act of my official career. Within a few hours, probably, that power which I have held for the period of five years, will be surrendered into the hands of another—without repining—without complaint on my part—with a more lively recollection of the support and confidence I have received during several years, than of the opposition which during a recent period I have encountered. In relinquishing power, I shall leave a name, severely censured, I fear, by many who, on public grounds, deeply regret the severance of party ties—deeply regret that severance, not from interested or personal motives, but from the firm conviction that fidelity to party engagements—the existence and maintenance of a great party—constitutes a powerful instrument of government. I shall surrender power, severely censured also, by others who, from no interested motives,

adhere to the principle of protection, considering the maintenance of it to be essential to the welfare and interests of the country. I shall leave a name execrated by every monopolist, who, from less honourable motives, clamours for protection because it conduces to his own individual benefit; but it may be that I shall leave a name sometimes remembered with expressions of good will, in the abodes of those whose lot it is to labour, and to earn their daily bread by the sweat of their brow, when they shall recruit their exhausted strength with abundant and untaxed food, the sweeter because it is no longer leavened by a sense of injustice."

Lord Palmerston, the only member of the new Whig ministry present, made a brief, but friendly comment on this most impressive speech. His lordship, with his usual good taste, abstained from all controversial topics, which would indeed have been out of place on an occasion when a cabinet had been dissolved by the divisions of its supporters, rather than by the strength of its opponents, and when a new administration could only stand by the aid of Sir Robert Peel's friends against the compact phalanx of the protectionists.

After a graceful introduction, Lord Palmerston said: "Sir, I agree with the right honourable baronet, that he has shown a proper deference to constitutional principle in bowing to the opinion—manifestly and clearly expressed—of the House of Commons. And I think he is perfectly right in having said that this would not have been an occasion, on which it would have been becoming or proper in him, to have advised the crown to exercise its prerogative of dissolving parliament, and going to a new election. I agree with him that no government could stand in England, with parties so divided as they are at present—that no government could rest upon a minority of this House, and that it would be

evidently inexpedient to dissolve parliament, when there is no prospect of converting that minority into a majority."

Here we must remark that the question of a dissolution was one which had been very carefully canvassed by all parties, and on which Sir Robert Peel differed from a considerable section of his faithful supporters. These gentlemen believed that the disunion between the Russell and the Grey sections of the Whigs, would render it possible for the liberal Conservatives to enter into an alliance, or rather to form a coalition, with the former. They believed that Peel occupied a position strictly analogous to that which Canning held about twenty years before, and that, like his great rival, he might, without any sacrifice of principle or compromise of dignity, accept the aid of moderate Whigs. Furthermore, they calculated largely on the grateful efforts of the League, and on the support of the Free-traders and Radicals throughout the country. They saw that a great change had come over the spirit of the old Radicals; the vulgar excesses of the Chartists had disposed many of them to become Conservatives, though not to become quite such rancorous renegades as poor Sir Francis Burdett. It was believed that several of them would have rallied to the cry of Peel and Progressive Reform, a motto which the Peel party might fairly have taken, under all the circumstances of the case and the time.

Some weighty objections could be urged in opposition to this reasoning. The incomplete coalition between Canning and the Whigs, broken as it was by the premature death of that statesman, and by the blundering incapacity of Lord Goderich, had severed neither party. Peel had himself assailed that coalition with well-remembered bitterness; and his brother-in-law, the right honourable George Alexander Dawson, usually regarded as the baronet's mouthpiece, had exhausted the vocabulary of vehement invective in its vitupe-

ration. The differences between the Russell Whigs and the Grey Whigs were after all very trifling ; they were certainly not of such magnitude as would have justified the schism of a party, which had struggled onwards through years of hopeless opposition, and had finally achieved the greatest constitutional change that had been wrought in England since the Revolution.

The shattered fragments of the Canning party might have increased these difficulties. The Duke of Richmond and Lord Stanly were leaders of the Protectionists ; they were therefore out of the question ; but the Earl of Ripon was a good Free-trader, and could not be passed over ; Sir James Graham was an ally, with whom Peel could not dispense, and a deserter with whom the Whigs could not again associate.

The Free-traders had already given the entire glory of the repeal of the Corn-Laws to Richard Cobden, excluding from their gratitude not merely Sir Robert Peel and Lord John Russell, but even the Honourable C. P. Villiers, (who had been for many a year their recognized parliamentary leader,) Bright, Bowring, Hume, Ricardo, and Colonel Thompson. All the organization of the League was directed exclusively to raising a fund for the Cobden Testimonial ; and Cobden himself went on a visit to the Continent, in order to leave his admirers greater liberty of action. It is, therefore, rather doubtful, whether the Leaguers would have afforded Sir Robert Pecl all the support which his more sanguine adherents so confidently anticipated.

As to the Radicals, they were few in number, and had little or no weight in the country. Erratic in their course, usually men of one idea, obstinate in their opinions, and unconciliatory in all their proceedings, they would have been about the most unmanageable supporters that ever formed a contingent to the parliamentary forces of a British statesman. We therefore agree with Lord Palmerston, that Sir

Robert Peel adopted the best course by not resorting to the expedient of dissolving parliament, when it was more than doubtful whether he could obtain a working majority by any combination of parties, from a new election.

In a subsequent part of his speech, Lord Palmerston said, “There were many parts of the speech which the House has just heard from the right honourable baronet, to which I have listened with much pleasure. I was glad to hear, for example, the principles which he put forth with respect to the government of Ireland. I rejoiced to hear him recognize the right of that people to every privilege, civil, political, and municipal—that difference of religious opinions was not in future to affect the policy pursued towards the people of Ireland—and that the employments disposable by the government ought to be distributed freely, without reference to the religious sentiments of those who might become the candidates for such employments. If I were disposed to treat the speech of the right honourable baronet in a different spirit, I might express some passing regret that the opinions which we have now heard him deliver, had not been expressed by him at a different period.”

The portion of Sir Robert Peel’s speech on which Lord Palmerston thus commented was really a mischievous mistake, not designed to produce evil, but rendered sadly pernicious by subsequent events. We have shown that the original strength of O’Connell’s agitation had been derived from the factious opposition given by Sir Robert Peel and his party to all the Whig measures for the improvement of Ireland. The unhappy phrase of Lord Lyndhurst—“aliens in language, religion, and blood,” had sunk deep in the minds of the Irish people, and is at this hour vengefully remembered. But the agitation retained all the strength which it had derived from extrinsic causes; and, as we have seen, it obtained, in 1843, an excess of turbulent power,

which O'Connell felt was fast going beyond his control, and which he viewed with an alarm that almost amounted to panic terror. Peel's conciliatory remarks were regarded as a concession to the agitators, and a bidding for the support of the agitation. The movement from thenceforth assumed a new and formidable phase; the Repealers regarded themselves not as O'Connell's party, but as a distinct power in the state. Their old leader's authority was set at nought, in the intoxication of their gratified pride; and he had the mortification to find that he would not be allowed to compromise Repeal as a means of giving support to the Whigs, and receiving from them his old share of Irish patronage in return. He made a bold and manly fight against the zealots of the Young Ireland party, but the effort was too great for his age and his health; he broke down under it, leaving a disorganized and demoralized populace without a guide and without a head.

John O'Connell succeeded to the leadership, which was now but an empty name. He took hold of Sir Robert Peel's declaration as evidence that agitation had made the Repealers a political power, and had given them a right to a participation in the patronage of the government. But the Whigs were not going to repeat the Normanby blunder of paying *Dane-gelt*, though they took one bad step in restoring to the magistracy some six or seven agitators who had been deprived of the commission of the peace for taking a prominent part in the seditious movements of 1843. John O'Connell believed that he could dragoon the Whigs into an alliance with his band of Repealers; he, therefore, assailed them with such an utter disregard of sense or prudence, that his chief charges were their refusal to break through the laws of economic science, and to try Louis Blanc's pernicious experiment of providing food and employment for an entire nation, on a more gigantic scale, and under more desperate

circumstances, than the experiment was tried in France. It was said by the unscrupulous agitators, that this wicked nonsense would have been a recognized principle of government if Sir Robert Peel had remained in power, and the phrases praised by Lord Palmerston were quoted as evidence of this mendacious absurdity. John O'Connell contrived to destroy himself with both parties; no statesman could have anything to do with a politician whose writings and speeches betrayed an ignorance of economic science, which would disgrace the youngest pupil in a national school. He, day after day, demanded as practicable and salutary, measures which the slightest examination showed to be impracticable and most dangerous. At the same time, while he abused the Whigs for not putting into practice schemes which he declared essential to the salvation of Ireland, he resisted every proposal to extort their enactment from the government by force. A position of such obvious inconsequence and inconsistency could not have long been held by the most able demagogue that ever misled a nation. Defied by the Whigs, suspected of insincerity by the people, outheroded by the frantic declamations of younger and more unscrupulous agitators, John O'Connell saw the leadership wrested from his hands, and had to make the most despicable retreat that stands recorded even in Irish history.

The mistaken view of Sir Robert Peel's speech was one of the principal elements in securing the vacant leadership for Mr. William Smith O'Brien, whose chief qualifications for the office were egregious vanity, a diseased love of notoriety, and that bull-headed obstinacy which is sometimes mistaken for courage. Few men have so completely realized the character of a fanatic in folly; he deliberately gathered round him the felony and vagrancy of Dublin, because from these classes only could he obtain the amount of adulation that could gratify his inordinate conceit; and in his hands

Repeal soon assumed the aspect of rebellion, and the deliberate purpose of civil war. We regard Sir Robert Peel's speech as mischievous, only because it was followed by events which he could not by possibility foresee, much less control. Who, indeed, could have anticipated a second year of Irish famine, and the establishment of a French republic?

Lord Palmerston then referred to the eulogy which Sir Robert Peel had paid to Richard Cobden. On this point he said,—“The right honourable baronet has well said that the merit of this great measure is not due to honourable members on this or on that side of the House, it is, on the contrary, due to the talent, the perseverance, the ability, and the firmness of my honourable friend, the member for Stockport. The right honourable baronet has paid a just and deserved compliment to the name of Richard Cobden. When the House and the country look to the highest point in the history of these events, they will see the name of Richard Cobden—a man distinguished by great zeal and enlightenment in advancing a great and important change of our commercial code, and a man likewise who presents in his own person a distinguished result of that parliamentary reform carried by this side of the House—a reform which has produced this among other great results, whatever might have been anticipated by the honourable gentlemen who now sit opposite. The true and original cause which led the right honourable baronet to propose a Repeal of the Corn Laws, was the fact—that the Reform Bill had been previously passed.”

It was supposed by many persons at the time, that Sir Robert Peel, expecting a summons to resume office at no very distant period, was anxious to conciliate Cobden, preparatory to asking him to become his colleague. Such a purpose, if ever formed, which we very much doubt, must have been abandoned when Cobden accepted the

large sum raised to remunerate his services by public subscription. From that moment Mr. Cobden must have abandoned all prospect of office; as a minister, he could never realize the extravagant expectations sure to be formed by his ardent admirers, and every one who had subscribed to his testimonial would believe that he had purchased a right to reproach him. As an independent member of parliament, Mr. Cobden has a useful, and, we trust, a long career before him; but if he accepted office, he would only bring continuous embarrassments to any ministry he joined, and incur a long series of mortifying vexations himself.

Mr. Hume spoke of Sir Robert Peel and his valedictory address in still warmer and more flattering terms than Lord Palmerston. He said, "I am anxious, as a humble individual, not to let the conversation close without saying one or two words. I have been long opposed to the right honourable baronet; but I must congratulate the country on the right honourable baronet's having brought this great measure to a successful termination. He has brought this country, by removing the restrictions from our commercial code, to a situation to which the whole world will anxiously aspire. I consider that the right honourable gentleman has rendered such a service to his country as will redound for ever to the honour of his name. When he came into office, he found the country engaged in war, and I am sure that no consolation will be greater to the right honourable baronet than that, when he left office, he left it at peace with all the world. He has also by his great measure afforded fair and ample scope for the employment of capital and industry, and for which he deserves as much, or more credit, than any predecessor in office. I am satisfied, that when this measure is properly carried out, it will confer the greatest benefits on the civilized world; I regret, therefore, that at this moment, circumstances

should compel the right honourable baronet to resign the helm of power; and I am sure that his retirement is the source of regret and a matter of sympathy with millions. No one ever left power carrying with him so much of the sympathy of the people. I will venture to say, that those honourable gentlemen who are now opposed to him on this great question will, before many years elapse, regret the course which they have taken, and will become converts to the system which he advocated. I individually feel the greatest gratitude to the right honourable baronet for the manner in which he has carried out this great measure."

A few days after these proceedings, the construction of Lord John Russell's administration was made known to the public. It was constituted as follows:—

#### THE CABINET.

Lord Chancellor .....	Lord Cottenham
President of the Council .....	Marquis of Lansdowne
Lord Privy Seal .....	Earl of Minto
Secretary-of-State, Home-Department .....	Sir George Grey
, Foreign Affairs .....	Lord Palmerston
, Colonies .....	Earl Grey
First Lord of the Treasury .....	Lord John Russell
Chancellor of the Exchequer .....	Sir C. Wood
Duchy of Lancaster .....	Lord Campbell
Paymaster-General .....	Mr. Macaulay
Woods and Forests .....	Viscount Morpeth
Postmaster-General .....	Marquis of Clanricarde
President of the Board of Trade .....	Earl of Clarendon
Control .....	Sir John Hobhouse
Chief Secretary for Ireland .....	Mr. Labouchere
First Lord of the Admiralty .....	Earl of Auckland

#### NOT OF THE CABINET.

Lord-Lieutenant of Ireland.....	Earl of Besborough
Commander-in-Chief .....	Duke of Wellington
Master-General of the Ordnance .....	Marquis of Anglesea

The most friendly feelings existed between Sir Robert Peel and Lord John Russell; the latter indeed was anxious



THE RT HONBLE LORD JOHN RUSSELL, M.P.

Russell



to introduce three of Sir Robert Peel's friends into his cabinet, namely, Lord Dalhousie, Lord Lincoln, and Mr. Sidney Herbert, but they were naturally afraid of the imputation of being actuated by too great a love of place, and they declined, but in courteous, and even amicable terms. The Earl of Dalhousie was subsequently appointed Governor-General of India by Lord John Russell's cabinet. This attempt to form a ministry on a comprehensive basis, was severely criticised by Mr. T. Duncombe and Mr. Wakley in the House of Commons. The latter took the opportunity of paying an eloquent tribute to the administration of Sir Robert Peel :—

" I am utterly at a loss," he said, " to understand why it was that Sir Robert Peel left his place in the cabinet, and gave up his situation to others, who are scarcely prepared to carry out the liberal principles which the right honourable baronet professed in the last speech that he delivered to this House. On all such occasions as this, the public have a distinct right to comprehend what are the ruling principles of men in power. At this moment, Sir Robert Peel is the most popular man in the kingdom. He is beloved, he is almost adored by the masses, who believe that no minister before him ever made such sacrifices as he has made on their behalf; and I can assure the noble lord, (Lord John Russell,) and the present administration, that if they do not act upon the principles which the right honourable baronet maintained in the last speech he addressed to this House, their continuance in office will be but for a very short period. I lament the course which the government seems inclined to pursue—that apathetic and do-nothing course which obtained so much odium for them when they were in office before, and deprived them of the confidence of the people. If the noble lord and his colleagues adopt the old course,

they will share a similar fate, and Sir Robert Peel will return to power upon the shoulders of the people, and will remain there just as long as he pleases."

There were but few protectionists present, when this eulogistic speech was delivered, but those few received it with marked symptoms of distaste and dissatisfaction. Mr. Newdegate, one of the number, tartly replied in the following terms:—"I cannot say that I think Sir Robert Peel has gained much by the praise he has received to-night. It has been all based upon the principles announced in his last speech to this House; and I regret to say—for I feel no personal animosity towards that right honourable baronet—that if any speech ever utterly shook the confidence of this country in that right honourable baronet, it was that memorable speech; and I think that the fact of the adherents whom the right honourable gentleman gained by it, being those who profess extreme opinions, and advocate ultra-changes, is the best justification of the course adopted by the party with which I act, in giving a firm, consistent, and successful resistance to the right honourable baronet's longer continuance in office."

The grounds on which Lord John Russell justified his seeking the assistance of the colleagues of the late premier, are well deserving of attention. He stated that he agreed with Sir Robert Peel on the necessity of abolishing monopoly, the expediency of carrying out the doctrines of Free Trade, and the desirableness of adopting a conciliatory policy towards Ireland. Now, though it may be considered necessary to have the members of an administration in perfect accordance as to the great principles on which a government should be conducted, it is not equally necessary, indeed it is hardly desirable, that they should be similarly agreed on every question to be brought before parliament. There was a greater union of opinion and a more perfect identity of conduct in

Sir Robert Peel's cabinet, than in any which had been formed since the accession of the House of Hanover; but it was not on that account stronger in itself, or more advantageous to the country. It would have been better in both respects, if at its first formation a latitude of opinion had been allowed on the Free-trade question. The startling spectacle of the conversion of an entire cabinet would have been avoided, and there would not have followed that shaking of all confidence in public men, which ever must be a serious evil to a nation.

In point of fact, the new cabinet was based on the principle of allowing a large latitude of opinion on what are called "open questions." A question may fairly and even usefully be left open, until contingencies arise which create a necessity for immediate decision. O'Connell's election for Clare was such a contingency at the time of the Catholic question; the famine in Ireland was a similar contingency in relation to Free Trade. On the proper mode of dealing with the Irish church, different opinions are entertained by the Grey and Russell sections of the cabinet; and should the march of events force that question into issue, there must either be a schism in the ministry, or one section must sacrifice its opinions to the other. Until, however, such a contingency arises, it would be very injurious to maintain a principle of unity, which would deprive the country of the services either of Earl Grey or of Lord John Russell.

The question of the sugar duties was one which possessed the most urgent claims on the attention of the new ministry, as a necessary sequel to the settlement of the Corn-Laws. Sir Robert Peel's government, if it had remained in office, must have been prepared to grapple with this difficulty, which was now left as a legacy to its successors. It was generally known that Sir Robert Peel was prepared to legislate on Free-trade principles in sugar as he had in corn.

But there was, as we have heretofore remarked, a disturbing element in the sugar question—that of slavery. The West Indians declared that they could not compete with the planters of Cuba and Brazil, who had at their command an unlimited supply of slave-labour, while they had but a very inadequate supply of free-labour.

Although we have already gone over this ground, yet, as we then directed our attention more to the point that the consumption of slave-grown produce tends to the encouragement of slavery, than to the more practical matter of the supply of labour, we shall take this opportunity of adverting to this part of the question.

No principle is better established in economic science than that slave-labour is, on the whole, and, in the long run, dearer than free-labour; but in this proposition it is tacitly assumed that an adequate supply of free-labour can be had. If then it be true that the negroes found it more desirable to cultivate fields of their own as proprietors, than to work as day-labourers on plantations, the amount of labour applicable to sugar-cultivation must have been greatly diminished in quantity, and greatly enhanced in price. As a remedy for this, it was proposed to encourage free immigration from Africa on a large scale. But this could hardly be effected without reviving something very like the slave-trade. Migratory habits are inconsistent with the characteristics of the negro race, and the condition of hired labourers is one which it would be difficult to make them comprehend; but any compulsion exercised through the medium of their chiefs would be slavery in no very disguised form. The importation of the hill-coolies from British India was recommended strongly as an expedient; but when the experiment was tried on a small scale, it signally failed.

But labour is even a more important element in the culti-

vation of sugar in the British colonies than in Cuba, Brazil, or Port Rico ; for sugar is a very impoverishing crop, and can only be grown repeatedly from the same soil by the most careful manuring and preparing of the ground. These processes are not required in Brazil and Cuba, for in these countries there are vast tracts of virgin and unexhausted soil, where sugar will grow luxuriantly without any previous preparation.

Lord John Russell brought forward his measure on the 20th of July. In principle it differed from that which Sir Robert Peel had prepared only in abandoning the distinction between slave-grown and free-labour sugar ; it provided for the gradual extinction of protective and differential duties, giving to the planters as a compensation some facilities for promoting the immigration of labourers. The ministerial project was vehemently opposed by Lord George Bentinck and the Protectionists ; but, to the great surprise of everybody, it was warmly supported by Lord Sandon (since Earl of Harrowby), who had moved the amendment on this very question which led to the overthrow of the Melbourne administration.

The fate of Lord John Russell's ministry depended upon the course to be taken by Sir Robert Peel. The right honourable baronet supported the measure, though he expressed strong disapprobation of some of its leading features. As no part of Sir Robert Peel's career has been more severely criticised than his conduct at this crisis, we deem it but justice to give at full length the speech which he delivered in vindication of his conduct :

“ Sir, the House will probably recollect—it has indeed been adverted to by the noble lord the member for King's Lynn, (Lord G. Bentinck,)—that at an early period of the present session I announced the intention of the late government to propose a measure with reference to the admission of foreign sugar, based on different principles from that

which the noble lord had proposed. The proposal which I intended to make on the part of the government, was designed to give greater facilities and encouragement to the admission of free-labour sugar; and I have no hesitation in saying, that had the government remained in office, the proposal which I should have made would have been identical with that which I announced in the early part of the session. That measure so proposed, on the part of the government, would have continued the exclusion from the markets of this country, of sugar the produce of slave-labour; but it would have admitted at lower rates of duty than the present, foreign sugar which is the produce of free-labour, in competition with sugar the produce of our own possessions.

“And, sir, having made that announcement, it is not without the greatest hesitation, that I have come to a conclusion as to the vote which it will be my duty to give on the present occasion. I, and those with whom I acted, always felt this question of slave-labour, and the produce of slave-labour, to be an exception from the principles which ought to govern our ordinary commercial policy. I thought we stood in a peculiar relation to our West India colonies. The case of the East Indies differs materially, in respect to the supply of labour, from the West India Colonies. In the case of those colonies, you had emancipated from slavery the negroes on whose labour, in former years, the colonists had mainly relied for the supply of this country with West India produce. You had given to the holders of slaves, a liberal, and, estimating it as to pecuniary amount, apparently a munificent compensation for the sacrifice of their property; but, however large that sum may have been, whether it was an adequate compensation for the eventual loss sustained, is a matter open to considerable doubt. Be that, however, as it may, you did subject the West India Colonies to great disadvantages in competing with those countries where slavery is

still maintained. That peculiar relation in which you thus stood to the West Indies, appeared to us to justify a departure from ordinary rules, and to require, in justice to those colonies, that at least a considerable interval should be allowed to elapse before they were required to enter into competition with countries placed under very different circumstances. Such also was the opinion entertained by one of the most strenuous and able advocates for the general application of the principles of Free Trade—I allude to Mr. Deacon Hume—who, as my honourable friend who spoke last, justly observed, always professed to consider the condition of the West Indies as forming an exception to the general rule.

“On that account, considering the difficulties under which they laboured—considering the great advantage to this country of promoting the welfare of that great portion of the empire—considering the great importance of retaining the affections of that portion of our colonial empire—I deemed it to be perfectly justifiable to permit a considerable interval to elapse, in order to enable the West India proprietors to prepare to meet that formidable competition to which they must be exposed, in the supply of sugar and other articles the produce of slave-labour. We thought also, that we stood in a peculiar relation to other countries, with respect to the abolition of slavery. We had undertaken to constitute ourselves the police of the seas, for the purpose of suppressing slavery; we had departed from all those principles which generally govern our international relations; we had formed treaties with other powers, by virtue of which they consented to abolish slavery, and to submit themselves to certain regulations with respect to the management of their own concerns, so far as slavery and the slave-trade were concerned; we had established the right of search; and, on foregoing the right of search in the case of France, we had stationed, in concert with France, an immense fleet on the

coast of Africa, for the purpose of preventing the transfer of the natives of Africa to other countries in order that they might there labour as slaves.

“ All this was a departure from the principles which ordinarily govern our international relations. We had a perfect right to abolish slavery for ourselves ; but, influenced by the purest dictates of humanity, we had gone farther—we had desired that our example should influence other countries, inducing them also to abolish slavery and the slave-trade ; and, for the purpose of giving effect to our wishes, we did not merely rely on the force of international engagements, but we applied our physical power—we employed our navy, for the purpose of destroying, if possible, the slave-trade. It did appear to us that there would be great inconsistency in taking these vigorous measures for the repression of a trade which we ourselves carried on, under the sanction of the law, but a few years since, and at the same time in giving, by any act of ours, encouragement to that trade ; and with these impressions, had we remained in power, it certainly was our intention to have given a farther period to the colonists of this country, particularly to the West India colonies, in order that they might be enabled to bear the competition with slave-labour sugar.

“ From all that was said by the noble lord (Lord George Bentinck) with respect to the abominations of this traffic, I think it is impossible that there can be any dissent. Sir, it is utterly impossible to review the state of public feeling and public opinion in the Brazils, on the part of the proprietors of land, and on the part also of the government of that country, without being shocked at their indifference to the monstrous evil and wrong of slavery.

“ The noble lord gave, from one of the papers laid on the table of this House, a specimen of the horrors which accompany the slave-trade. The House sympathized with the

noble lord in the observations he made with respect to these abominations ; and if it could be shown, that by raising the price of sugar to the amount of one penny or three-halfpence a pound, an effectual stop could be put to the horrors of that traffic, I agree with the noble lord, that this country, which made a sacrifice of £20,000,000 for the purpose of purchasing a right in the liberties and lives of their fellow-creatures in the West Indies, would willingly submit to that farther sacrifice. And I do not deny that, having apprehensions which many do not entertain with respect to the possible effect of the measure proposed by her Majesty's ministers, fearing it may at first, at least, give a stimulus to the slave-trade, it is not without great reluctance that I have come to the conclusion to give my support to the proposal of the noble lord.

"I do so on this ground : I am forced to consider other than the mere abstract merits of the question. I am forced to consider the position of political parties, and the prospects of forming another government, in the event of the overthrow of the present. I agree with the noble lord, the member for Lynn, that there ought to be no sham and delusive opposition to the measure of the government. If there be opposition, it ought to be an opposition disregarding the possible consequence of it, namely, that it might be fatal to the government. I believe it might be possible, by a combination of parties, to displace the noble lord ; at least I believe it might be possible, by such a combination, to prevent the present success of the measure the noble lord has proposed.

"I think it would be possible by the union of different parties, by appeals to the feelings and passions of the people of this country, to raise a decisive, but temporary, impediment to the success of the noble lord's measure ; but I feel bound to ask myself the question,—'Is it consistent with my duty to sanction and be a party to that combination ?'

I think it is not. Sir, the government with which I was connected, has been very recently displaced by a vote of this House, tantamount to a withdrawal of confidence. I yielded respectfully to that decision. The noble lord was called on by her Majesty to form an administration apparently with the general concurrence of this House. As one of the first acts of that administration, the noble lord has made a proposal for the final adjustment of this difficult and long-debated question. Surely we must have been prepared for such a proposal on the part of the noble lord. I for one, did not expect that the noble lord would resume power without making a proposal for the settlement of this question. How could I have any doubt on that head? Last year, in the month of February, when I proposed, on the part of her Majesty's government, that foreign free-labour sugar should be admitted into consumption in this country at reduced duties, the noble lord moved an express resolution that the attempt to discriminate between free-labour sugar and slave-labour sugar was deceitful and illusory; that no distinction could in justice be maintained; that the attempt to maintain it would be injurious to the revenue, would confer no benefit on the consumers, and that therefore it should be given up. That was the purport of the resolution which the noble lord, in the month of February, 1845, submitted to the House. In the course of the present year, after the statement which was made by me, as to the policy of the late government on the sugar question, the same noble lord before the Whitsuntide recess gave a distinct intimation that he would move a resolution to this effect—'That the distinction between the produce of slave-labour and free-labour ought not to be maintained.' The noble lord also gave a distinct notice that, in the event of that principle being affirmed, he would make the very proposal which is now under debate: namely, that at a period to be fixed, all

discriminating duties between foreign sugar, and sugar the produce of British colonies, should be abolished. Nor is this all. In the course of the last year, the noble lord, the member for Tiverton (Lord Palmerston), acting in concert with his party, placed a construction upon the treaties with Spain different from that which the government placed on those treaties. In the opinion of the noble lord, not only considerations of good policy, but considerations of good faith, prevented us from excluding the produce of the Spanish colonies, sugar among the rest, from the markets of this country. Could I then doubt, that when these noble lords were called to power, one of their earliest acts would be a proposal to the House of Commons to follow that course which they had uniformly advocated, not merely on the ground of public policy, but of national good faith.

"It was for the noble lord to determine, on his accession to power, whether he would at once adopt that course, or take time to consider and adjust all the parts of a very complicated question. The noble lord resolved to proceed at once; but whether he proceeded at once, or delayed his measure till next session, was a mere question of time, not a question of principle. I distinctly understood that on the accession to power of the noble lord, he and his friends were pledged to bring in a measure for the abolition of the discriminating duties between foreign free and foreign slave-labour sugar. And it is perhaps better that this question should be met at once than that the country should be left in uncertainty as to the course which is to be adopted. In some respects there would be advantage, no doubt, in delay, because there are parts of this measure that require very serious consideration, and which I hope will yet receive it from the noble lord. There is the question of the admission of sugar and molasses into distilleries, and there is also the adjustment of the spirit duties in the several ports of the United Kingdom.

These are points which require very full deliberation, and to which I trust the noble lord will apply his mind. There is also the still more important subject of supplying additional labour to our colonies. I confess, I have less sanguine hopes than many, as to the extent to which this can be done. Give every encouragement you can to the immigration of free-labour; disregard, as I think you ought, imputations that you feel to be unfounded, such as that you are encouraging the slave-trade by so doing; place the free labourers resorting to your colonies in an advantageous position, and treat them with every regard to justice. But with all the encouragement you can give, I am afraid there are many difficulties to surmount.

"Speaking in the first place of the West India colonies, the expense of bringing there, the natives of Africa, is very great; and observe, unless you accompany the immigration of the males with a proportionate supply of females, you encounter the risk of appalling evils. For the purpose of promoting the ultimate success of the experiment, it is of the utmost importance that there should be a due proportion of females to the males introduced into your colonies, increasing considerably the expense of immigration. Therefore it is, that entertaining less sanguine expectations of the effect of the introduction of free-labour than others entertain, I hope the noble lord and her Majesty's government will maturely consider whether there are any equivalent advantages which they can give the West India proprietors which on the abolition of protecting duties, may enable them to enter into competition with those who have slave-labour at their command.

"I return, however, to the question—Am I justified in entering into a combination for the purpose of displacing the noble lord from the government within six weeks from the period at which he acceded to it? Gentlemen seem to think

that they may safely enter into that combination, for that the noble lord will retain office, notwithstanding defeat on this measure. I know not how the noble lord would act; but I think the noble lord, under the circumstances in which he accepted power, being defeated in so important a measure as the present, would be fully justified in resigning office. Those who would, through a party combination, compel him to abdicate power, are bound to ask themselves whether, in the event of success, they are prepared to undertake the government. There are circumstances in the history of every country, when that question must be answered by those who enter into combinations to subvert a government. Two governments have existed within the last six weeks. Shall we have a third? If so, on what principle is it to be formed? Shall it be the restoration of the late government? ['No, No!'] I entirely concur in that sentiment. I think with you who cry 'No,' that if the late government, having withdrawn from office in consequence of a vote which proved that it had forfeited the confidence of this House, were now to take a course, by which at the end of six weeks it might be restored to office, it would be doing that which would be altogether discreditable. What prospect is there that that government would have increased facility for governing this country? I believe, none; and therefore I will not be a party to the displacing of the government of the noble lord, with a view to the restoration of the late government. Well then, with respect to a government to be constituted of others, the advocates of protection—I mean to speak of them with the respect that is due to their consistent and conscientious advocacy of their own opinions; but they cannot be surprised that I refuse to lend myself to a measure which might have the effect of placing in power those who are not merely the advocates of protection, as an abstract principle,

but who avow their desire to recall and revoke the great change in our commercial poliey whieh has lately been made.

" Seeing then no prospeet of establishing an effieient administration on any principle of whieh I could approve, I will be no party to an act which might, and in my opinion ought, to displaee the noble lord, after a few weeks' tenure of power. I see nothing to be gained by it, so far as the general interests of the country are concerned. Still, it may be contended that the defeat of this measure, and a change of government in consequence, will at least effect one great object—it will prevent the admission of sugar the produc of slave-labour. Now if it could be shown that after the defeat of the noble lord and his retirement from power, a government could be formed that would be enabled permanently to resist the introduction of slave-labour sugar into this country, then I should admit that the member for the University of Oxford, and those who sincerely concur with him in thinking that at all risks slave-labour sugar should be excluded from this country, would be justified in adhering rigidly to their principle. But I greatly doubt whether in the present state of publie opinion, in the present state of parties, and after the reeent changes in our whole eommercional poliey, any government that could be formed would be able permanently to resist the introduction of slave-labour sugar? The resolution proposed by the noble lord (Bentinek) does not affirm that slave-labour sugar shall not in any case be introduced into the country; it does not even lay down the principle that we will maintain the *status quo* as to foreign produc, and continue to take cotton and tobacco the produc of slave-labour, but that we will go no further. In fact, the resolution is very much the same in substance as that of the noble lord the member for Liverpool,

in 1841. It leaves the continued exclusion of slave-labour sugar into this country, mainly dependent on the supply there may happen to be of free-labour sugar. The noble lord's resolution is this :—

“‘ That in the present state of the sugar cultivation in the British East and West India possessions, the proposed reduction of duty upon foreign slave-grown sugar is alike unjust and impolitic, as tending to check the advance of production by British free-labour, and to give a great additional stimulus to the slave-trade.’

“Observe the words ; ‘In the present state of sugar cultivation.’ If then a change should take place in that state of cultivation ; if the produce should fall greatly short of the demand, and prices become in consequence greatly increased, the noble lord's resolution does not exclude the introduction of slave-labour produce in this country. What confidence can the colonists have in this proposition ? What assurance can you give them of the permanency of such a system ? There might be a complete change of circumstances. The estimates of the supply of sugar which the noble lord had formed for this night, might not be justified ; the actual production of our colonies might be much less than he has anticipated ; and whenever that result shall follow, the colonists must have reason to think that the country would not bear the consequent high price of sugar, but would inevitably seek some reduction of that price by the admission of slave-labour produce. And then, you do not venture to affirm the principle, that under no circumstances will you admit slave-labour sugar ; as you merely make the exclusion of slave-labour sugar dependent on the ‘present state of the cultivation of sugar’ in our colonial possessions ; you do not give to the colonists any assurance, that they may safely rely on the continuance of their present amount of protection. Now, all parties, both West Indian and East Indian, attach

great importance to a permanent law on this subject ; and the proposition of the government has this advantage over the proposition of the noble lord, that it guarantees to them, at any rate for a certain period, a qualified protection for their produce, providing at the same time that there shall be a free importation of all sugar into this country at an equal rate of duty at the expiration of that period. Now to that consideration of certainty I apprehend they attach the greatest importance. But unless you are willing to consent to something of this sort—to something like the measure of the government in principle—can you expect to establish a permanent law in the place of that law which at present is only of annual duration ? I did not expect to have passed a permanent law this year, had I remained in office. I only contemplated a measure for continuing the Sugar Duties for a year ; and I greatly doubt if any government that could be called to power could pass any other than the usual annual bill, if they did not attempt the permanent adjustment of the question. We cannot deny that there is great evil in the uncertainty that must attend annual legislation on such a subject ; great evils as regards the slave-trade, and the condition of the slaves themselves ? What would be the natural consequences if the slave-holder of Brazil and Cuba, observing the state of public feeling in this country, should find that the question was yearly made the subject of bitter controversy in this and the other house of parliament ? He would never cease, as long as that state of things remained, to cherish the hope that his produce would at length be admitted into this country, and that the price here must sooner or later rise so high that the legislature must admit his produce in deference to the wants and wishes of the people. But if that would be the feeling of the slave-holding states and colonies, what would be the feelings of our own colonists ? They would always be oppressed with the fear

that they might at an early period be subjected to competition with foreign slave-labour produce; and they would in consequence never know when they might invest capital, or enter upon fresh enterprises with security. The noble lord (Lord George Bentinek,) has great expectations of the large importations which are to come in from the East Indies; but surely those expectations of the noble lord's would be confirmed by the salutary operation of a permanent measure. That particular species of ease of which the noble lord spoke would be cultivated with greater security were the intentions of the legislature on the subject of the sugar-duties finally made known. So with the West Indies, the application of capital, the extended use of machinery, must labour under great discouragement so long as, owing to the nicely balanced state of parties in parliament, and the state of the supply of sugar in this country, it is always uncertain whether slave-labour sugar may not be introduced to compete with their produce. I think then, the hour is come for a change of the law in respect to the sugar-duties, and that those of us who are the most anxious to discourage slavery and the slave-trade, must consent to the effort to beat slave-labour, and the slaveholder's capital, not by prohibitory duties, but by means of free-labour competition. I believe upon the whole, in the present state of opinion in this country, and in the present state of parties in this House, there may be a better chance of controlling slavery by giving to free labour other encouragement than prohibitory duties. I will not enter into the details of the noble lord's plan. My earnest hope is, that the noble lord will consider that the great object to be aimed at is, to make a final and satisfactory settlement; and that he will listen with attention to any proposal which, insuring the abolition of distinctive duties at an early period, and therefore preserving the great principle of his measure, will enable free-labour sugar suc-

cessfully to compete with slave-labour sugar. I give those opinions without any party motive. Being resolved to support the noble lord's measure in substance, and in its general outline, I do not intend to embarrass him by vexatious opposition on details. The advice I give is *bonâ fide* advice—that, aiming at the ultimate abolition of distinctive duties, the noble lord will at the same time do ample justice to those who have formidable competition to cope with. This will be the most certain method of ensuring the ultimate success of the great principle for which the noble lord contends. Entertaining these opinions, entertaining also the sincere belief that at no very remote period this measure, if it be obstructed now, must be ultimately carried, and that the period of uncertainty and suspense will be fraught with evil; believing, if the measure is to be finally carried, that there is no one better entitled to the credit attaching to success than the noble lord, I have come to the resolution, though not without reluctance and doubt, to give my support to the principle of his proposal."

Great indignation was felt and expressed by the Protectionists at the vote about to be given by Sir Robert Peel, and still more at the grounds upon which he rested its justification. Sir T. Aeland stigmatized in no measured terms the adoption of a course of conduct contrary to conscientious convictions, merely to suit the convenience of any ministry, much less a ministry of political opponents. All the anti-slavery prejudices of the House were raised by the speech, as if for the mere purpose of being offended by the vote. Mr. Miles followed Sir T. Aeland, but assailed the late premier in milder terms; he, however, dwelt rather on the deficient supply of labour in the West Indies than on the hackneyed and untenable assertion that the admission of slave-grown sugar for British consumption would increase the amount of slavery.

Mr. Hume, like Sir Robert Peel, supported the ministerial measure, though he dissented from many of its details, but for reasons very different from those assigned by the late premier. He maintained that the admission of slave-labour sugar into the British market would produce no effect on slavery in the colonies. He also showed with great clearness of statement, and convincing cogency of argument, that Sir Robert Peel was not justified in maintaining that the ministerial measure would increase slavery in Cuba and the Brazils. He hinted that it was rather unfair to support any measure by a damaging speech, and that to speak one way and vote another, was not the most honourable course for a statesman, nor the most safe for a politician.

Mr. Benjamin Disraeli opposed the ministerial measure with great spirit, but with infinitely more of invective than of argument. The conduct of Lord Sandon and Sir Robert Peel afforded him a tempting opportunity for the exercise of his sarcastic genius, and he availed himself of it to the utmost. After concluding his argument against the measure itself, he thus assailed the noble lord and right honourable baronet for giving it their volunteer support :

"I should no longer trespass upon the attention of the House, had I not remembered that there was one speech made in the debate last night, which I could not pass unnoticed. Sir, we heard last night a funeral oration delivered over the abolition cause, by the noble lord, the member for Liverpool (Lord Sandon.) I thought, if the subject was not choice, the orator at least was chosen. When I remembered another speech which that noble lord made on the same subject, at a period not very remote, I must say, he was the last person from whom I should have expected any criticism on the resolution of my noble friend (Lord G. Bentinck.) Certainly, the resolution of the noble lord the member for King's Lynn, whatever the taste of

others might have to object, did not contain that prudential parenthesis which appeared in the resolutions of the noble lord the member for Liverpool, in 1841. I cannot take upon myself, whatever may be my private opinion, to inform the House which is the authentic speech as regards the opinion of the noble lord (Sandon.) By courtesy it is the speech of last night ; by unction, I should say it is the speech of 1847. It completes the picture of this eventful session ; to see the noble lord the member for Liverpool mounted on a hogshead of sugar, in a white sheet, holding the taper of penitence, and crying '*peccavi.*' At his last election I remember the noble lord had carried before him a wooden bible. I am of opinion that the speech of last night was the wooden-bible speech. I believe the *litera vera* may still be found in the speech of 1841.

" Notwithstanding the defection from our ranks of this chosen champion of sugar and anti-slavery, I still had thought that we might have fought a good battle for the good old cause, if we could have enlisted on our side the wonted assistance of the right honourable gentleman, the member for Tamworth. The right honourable gentleman made a speech, which, in my opinion, was an admirable *résumé* of every argument which could be adduced against the resolutions of the noble lord at the head of the government. No one understands the question better than the right honourable gentleman ; there is not a detail which has escaped his thoughtful and vigilant attention ; and I am sure that the somewhat solemn warning he gave to the noble lord at the head of the government, to take care, if he facilitated immigration into the West Indies, that the free labourers should be accompanied by a sufficient supply of the gentler sex, would not be lost on the part of the noble lord. But great was the mortification of myself and my friends around me, when we understood that that speech terminated by a resolution which was fatal to our hopes.

"The reason which was given, however, for the course which the right honourable gentleman pursued was less ingenious, and more surprising, than most of the arguments we have heard even from him. If the right honourable gentleman really is convinced, as no one can doubt, of the opinions which he expressed with so much ability, is it possible that our colonial empire—a population under such peculiar circumstances—is it possible that such great interests, which if not national are most important and extensive; is it possible that these are to be sacrificed for such minute considerations as who shall sit on that (the ministerial) bench? I said a few minutes since, that if we go to the hustings, and tell the people of England that £50,000,000 of their treasure have been spent in prosecuting a delusion, perchance they may have some misgivings as to the excellence of this parliamentary government, under which they have so long been living; but when they are told that it is not a question of £50,000,000, but of principles, which they appreciate beyond all treasure, which are given up by one of the most gifted of our assembly against his conviction, for the sake of party convenience, and for the calculation as to 'who should be the minister of England,' then I fear it will be farewell to the parliament of England. The right honourable gentleman told us, that he could not, under the circumstances of the case, act otherwise than he did, because he could not see how any government could be formed. I will not stop to notice the indecorous habit which has crept into the House, of always speaking of the government of this country as to be appointed and selected, not by one out of the House and in a higher position, but by the House itself. But this I will tell the right honourable gentleman, that in my mind his *forte* lies not so much in forming a government as in destroying one. These are the views which I have imperfectly attempted to express, that have influenced the noble

lord the member for Lynn, and my friends around me, in resisting the resolutions of the government; and there is scarcely a member of the House, who will suppose that in the course which we have taken, we have been influenced by an illegitimate or sinister feeling. I can fairly say that as regards the government themselves; remembering the circumstances under which those noble lords and right honourable gentlemen acceded to power; remembering that I myself as a member of the majority that virtually placed them on that (the ministerial) bench, cannot, ought not to shrink from the minute portion of responsibility falling even to me. I should feel that it was a step greatly to be deprecated, and long to be pondered over, before, immediately after they had obtained power, we placed ourselves in collision with them. But I cannot believe, I cannot see, that any other course could have been taken by us than that which we have pursued. I believe that there is not a member of the government who can suppose that I am expressing opinions and sentiments which I do not feel; and if the government cannot impute such motives to us, still less do I believe that any other gentleman in the House, or party in the country, can imagine that we have been influenced by any factious or selfish feeling. The members of the West Indian body did not stand by us (the Protectionists,) 'in the hour of death and in the day of judgment,' and many gentlemen have said to me, 'Why should we support *them*?' I believe that they thought that by not fighting the battle then, they might still gain time; it is the policy of the weak, and it seems, by the admission of the right honourable gentleman, they might have been saved perchance for a year. Perhaps it is better that the catastrophe should be consummated. Perhaps it is better that if the system of protection is to be put an end to, that it should be put an end to under existing circumstances, and by this Protection parliament; which was elected virtually by

the success of a motion which pledged the Commons of England to support the colonial interests. I heard the other night the right honourable gentleman, the member for Tamworth, express the considerations that induced him to come to the conclusion at which he had arrived. I challenge the propriety of that resolution; I impugn the sagacity of that decision; I deny the assumed necessity on which it was founded. On the contrary, I say that the noble lord at the head of the government might more fairly have come forward and said, 'This is not a vital question, I should think, since, when the right honourable gentleman led the ministry and the parliament of England in 1830, he was opposed and defeated on the sugar-duties, and yet he did not think fit to resign,' the noble lord might have said, 'I have been called to power under peculiar parliamentary circumstances; I have received a *quasi* confidence from those who are opposed to me on great constitutional principles, and I have told them in a memorable speech,—a speech which did not in any degree compromise the position of the noble lord—'I have told them that I am not anxious to disturb the peace and public mind of England; that I am not desirous of bringing forward any question which should place us in collision. I have received a *quasi* confidence from a party who, on account of their numbers, are not to be despised, and I see before me one who has been a minister eminent for his ability, but who has pursued a course which, right or wrong, has forfeited for ever the confidence of parliamentary England; and considering all these circumstances; considering that the right honourable gentleman himself was once in a similar position, and did not think fit to resign; considering, that there is in this House of Commons no evidence of a hostile or factious opposition; considering the position of the right honourable gentleman himself, which is one which gives him great influence in this House, but who is deprived for ever of

any influence in the country; I think I am only doing my duty to my country and my sovereign, by, whatever may be the opinion of the House on this question, retaining power.' I believe that if under these circumstances the noble lord had remained in power, he would have remained with honour, with honour to his party and credit to himself, and, I am willing to believe, with advantage to the country: but the course taken by the noble lord has left none other to us, but to give it a hearty, honest, and most sincere opposition. I call therefore upon every member of the House who may be meditating on his decision, to divide with us; and I tell them that whatever may be the result, of this I am certain, that if it is carried against us, it is a decision that will give another, perhaps a last blow, to the character of public men; and I am sure that it will be received by those out of the House who sent us here, with blended feelings of sorrow and indignation."

When a division took place, the coalition between the followers of Sir Robert Peel and Lord John Russell gave the ministers a majority of 130; the numbers being 265 for Lord John Russell's motion, and 135 for Lord George Bentinck's amendment. A similar service, and on the very same question, was rendered to the Whig cabinet by Sir Robert Peel in 1848, when, but for his support, an adverse vote on the sugar duties would have forced Lord John Russell's ministry to retire from office.

One of the worst consequences of Sir Robert Peel's retiring speech was, that it involved the necessity of the abandonment of the Irish Arms act by the new administration. The intention of the government to renew this act created great dissatisfaction among the members of the liberal party, and every fair opportunity was seized to give vent to the strong emotions which had been excited on the subject. Ministers offered large concessions, but Sir Robert

Peel had created such a feeling in favour of adopting a generous and liberal policy towards Ireland, that it could not be resisted. The bill was, therefore, abandoned, and the consequence has been, the pike and rifle agitation which has distracted Ireland through the whole of the year 1848. Unfortunately, no one could have anticipated that men would have been found so perversely wicked as to endeavour to make the imperial government responsible for the visitations of Divine Providence, or so monstrously depraved as to point out to their countrymen the atrocities perpetrated, and the still greater horrors planned, by the red republicans of Paris, as examples that ought to be adopted and imitated in Ireland.

The parliamentary session, which, for the present at least, closed Sir Robert Peel's public life, did not reach its termination until the 28th of August, when the lord-chancellor read the following speech from the throne, as chief of the commission of prorogation :—

“ My Lords and Gentlemen,—We are commanded by her Majesty to express to you the warm acknowledgments of her Majesty for the public spirit you have evinced in the discharge of your laborious duties during an anxious and protracted session.

“ Her Majesty trusts that you will be rewarded by witnessing the beneficial results of the measures which have been sanctioned by her Majesty for the present relaxation and ultimate repeal of protective duties on corn and sugar.

“ Her Majesty entertains a confident hope that the more free admission of the produce of foreign countries into the home-market will increase the comforts and better the condition of the great body of the people.

“ Her Majesty feels the greatest satisfaction that her Majesty's endeavours to settle, in a manner consistent



with national honour, the conflicting claims of Great Britain and the United States, with respect to the territory on the north-west coast of America, have been completely successful.

“ Her Majesty continues to receive from all foreign powers the strongest assurances of their desire to cultivate friendly relations with this country.

“ Her Majesty commands us to congratulate you on the victorious course and happy conclusion of the war in India; and her Majesty has much gratification in announcing to you, that perfect tranquillity prevails throughout the whole of the British possessions in that quarter of the world.”

“ Gentlemen of the House of Commons,—Her Majesty has observed with satisfaction the care you have taken to prevent permanent loss to the revenue, and to maintain the public faith.

“ Her Majesty has commanded us to acknowledge the zeal and unanimity with which you assented to an increase in the naval and military estimates, which regard to the contingencies of the public service induced her Majesty to propose for your consideration.”

“ My Lords and Gentlemen,—Her Majesty has to lament that the recurrence of a failure in the potatoe crop, in an aggravated degree, will cause a serious deficiency in the quantity of a material article of food.

“ Her Majesty has given her cordial assent to measures by which this calamity may be mitigated in that part of the United Kingdom where the cultivation of the potatoe has hitherto afforded the chief supply for the subsistence of the people.

“ Her Majesty has seen with pleasure that a considerable diminution of crime and outrage has taken place in those countries of Ireland which had been most disturbed.

“ Her Majesty is confident, that on your return to your

several counties, you will find a spirit of loyalty generally prevalent. The extension of works of improvement has increased the demand for labour; and the tranquillity of the country has favoured the pursuits of industry in all its branches.

“ Her Majesty trusts, that by a combination of prudence with enterprise, and of a willing obedience to law with a desire for social progress, her people will, through the Divine Blessing, enjoy the full advantages of peace.”

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Thus terminated a session, the results of which have scarcely been paralleled in the annals of modern parliaments. The history of its proceedings may indeed be written in two words—**FREE TRADE**—for the ratification of that mighty economic principle formed the sum and substance of its labours. If we are to estimate legislation not according to the interests of parties, or by the changes wrought in the distribution of political power, but rather by the range of its influence, the duration of its effects, the numbers to whom it brings a blessing or a bane, and its connection with the daily occasions and most pressing necessities of mankind, we might look back as far as the era of 1688, ere we discovered changes so operative as those which, in the year 1846, were accomplished, under the auspices of Sir Robert Peel, upon the policy and upon the future destinies of Great Britain. Here then we close our account of the public life of this eminent statesman—his private history belongs to posterity: his patronage of art, science, and literature, varied and extensive as it has been, can be but partially known to those who have not the privilege of his acquaintance; and it is better to pass over such a subject in silence, than to produce false impressions of it by an imperfect sketch.

In looking over the whole course of Sir Robert Peel’s

public life, we feel that he was destined from the outset to achieve greatness, not so much by his intellectual powers, though these are of the highest order, as by his moral qualities of perseverance, discipline, study, and unwearied application. It was his misfortune to be brought up amongst those who had been most alarmed by the excesses of the first French Revolution, and who had formed the most anti-popular prejudices in consequence. The first and last article in his father's creed, was the infallibility of William Pitt.

“The pilot that weather'd the storm;”

but when young Peel chose this minister as his model, he estimated him rather from his public administration than from his private principles. Pitt was in heart and mind a reformer and an emancipator; but he sacrificed reform and emancipation to the prejudices of George III. and the English aristocracy: yet assuredly he would have resumed his advocacy of both, if any contingency had arisen which offered him a fair prospect of success. Peel was, on the contrary, trained up in conscientious opposition to Reform and Catholic Emancipation, and was taught to regard everything that might increase democratic power, as dangerous to the order of civil society.

His whole career has consequently been a slow process of conversion from early opinions, or rather prejudices. At the conclusion of his ministry in 1846, he had scarcely retained any one of the opinions with which he entered on political life: his conversion was unquestionably sincere, but it is painful to recollect that its process was slow, and that during its progress, Peel was the chief obstacle to effecting improvements, the delay of which caused serious injury to his country.

His reputation as a scholar, honourably earned at Harrow School, and in the University of Oxford, gave him some advantages at the commencement of his career, at a time

when classical knowledge was deemed a sound foundation for statesmanship. His cast of mind would have inclined him more to the dialectics of Aristotle than to the eloquent metaphysics of Plato, indeed he has more than once textually adopted the principles enunciated by Aristotle in his Ethics and Politics, without any apparent consciousness that he was making a quotation. Though well acquainted with the Greek poets and orators, he has fashioned his oratory more on the model of their amplified imitators. He probably prefers Virgil to Homer, and Cicero to Demosthenes. His sympathy with Cicero may to some extent be based on the striking analogy between his own position in the state, and that of "the great consul" in the commonwealth. Both belonged to the middle class by birth, and were connected with the aristocracy by education. Both fought the battle of the nobility against the pressing demands of the democracy with zeal, courage, and constancy. Both had to endure the mortification of defeat: Cicero witnessed the triumph of Cæsar; Peel, the passing of the Reform Bill; and both frankly accepted the new state of things, when they saw that its advent was inevitable.

Commencing political life as private secretary to Lord Liverpool, Mr. Peel had the disadvantage of being placed under a guide, whose chief recommendation to the office of prime minister of England, seems to have been that he was the very perfection of mediocrity. Lord Liverpool could never raise his mind to the level of any great question, and he therefore exerted himself to adjourn the necessity of a solution. His whole policy on the Catholic question was to put off the time for a final decision; to quiet the Catholics by placing some of their friends in office; and to prevent any claim among the partisans of the ascendancy, by assuring them that they could always rely on the House of Lords. This was a policy of miserable imbecility and shuffling

expediency; a worse school than Lord Liverpool's could hardly have been found for a rising statesman, and Peel did not shake off its traditional trammels, until he had nearly reached the close of his official career.

The first event in his life which gave a high promise of future statesmanship, was his report on the Bank and Bullion question, which prepared the way for the resumption of cash payments. It is no derogation to his character that he adopted principles previously enunciated by Mr. Horner; the merit lay not in the principles, but in the application of them; the very same principles were enunciated by Law, when he projected the Bank of France, and it was his departure from them which rendered the Mississippi scheme so disastrous, at the commencement of the last century. A convertible paper currency is so obviously the only protection against over-issue and consequent depreciation, that we may well marvel how any man in his senses could ever have asserted the contrary. The true merit of Peel is, that he took into his calculation all the difficulties which at the time beset the resumption of cash payments, and provided such modifications, as prevented the gradual extinction of restriction from producing any great perturbations or derangements in the monetary concerns of the country.

The secretariship for Ireland has long been regarded as a suitable apprenticeship for English statesmen: we believe that no office under the crown is worse adapted to the purpose; and that it was never a more perverse school of training than when Mr. Peel entered on its duties. Ascendancy was then rampant in Ireland; liberal Protestants were regarded as renegades, and aspiring Catholics as little better than rebels. The young secretary was surrounded by men whose passions had not cooled down since the insane insurrection of 1798, and whose pride of caste had been raised to a preposterous height by the suppression of that revolt.

They were men of great talents, of vivid energies, and of extraordinary convivial powers; even so late as 1829, Mr. Peel showed that their views of Ireland had been deeply impressed on his mind, and we doubt whether their influence has been even yet entirely effaced.

The abortive duel between O'Connell and Peel, which covered both with painful ridicule, was, in its consequences, an unfortunate event in Peel's career. We say in its consequences, for in itself the matter was so supremely contemptible, that it could hardly have afforded a theme for a nine-days' wonder. But O'Connell ever after believed that Peel shaped his Irish policy more to crush him and diminish his influence than to maintain any constitutional principle. Never was there a more groundless imputation: Peel never had any personal hostility, but politically he regarded him as the very incarnation of vulgar democracy; he therefore looked upon him with cool contempt, mitigated only by a reasonable fear of his unrivalled powers of mischief. On the other hand, O'Connell hated Peel with his whole heart, and excused himself to his own conscience for indulging such a feeling, by the erroneous persuasion that it was more than reciprocated. But O'Connell infused this persuasion into the minds of his followers; it passed as an aphorism in Ireland, that Peel abridged Irish liberties, and withheld Irish rights, from the unworthy motives of individual rancour and personal spite. It was a gross but most unfortunate error, and it is to be lamented that Sir Robert Peel's unconsciousness of its existence prevented him from making any efforts to counteract such a mischievous impression.

Undoubtedly the portion of his public career on which Sir Robert Peel may look back with most satisfaction, is the period in which, as Home Secretary under Lord Liverpool, he introduced the most salutary and merciful reforms into our criminal law. It is true that Romilly and Macintosh had

preceded him, but Sir William Meredith and Burke had gone before them. In this, as in the case of the currency, the merit did not rest on the discovery of the principles, but in the judicious application of them to the circumstances of the age and the country. The reputation which he acquired was more valuable, more permanent, and better calculated to stand rigid scrutiny, than the more brilliant fame which Canning derived from liberalizing our foreign policy. Administrative reforms are less showy than dashing expeditions, and flourishes in diplomacy, but they leave behind them enduring blessings to the community, while the acquisitions of diplomacy are scarcely worth the paper on which they stand recorded.

Canning and Peel were natural rivals, but their rivalry would not have assumed the form of personal hostility, but for the imprudence and passion of the injudicious adherents of both. We believe that Peel was inclined to allow Canning's ministry a fair trial; we further believe, that if such had been granted, its failure would have been inevitable, for, save himself, the Marquis of Lansdowne, and Mr. Huskisson, there was hardly a member of his cabinet who had any plausible pretensions to statesmanship. If Peel had been allowed "to bide his time," he would have escaped much painful feeling, and much mischievous misrepresentation.

As a colleague of the Duke of Wellington, Peel had to break entirely with the old party of the ascendancy, when he proposed the repeal of the Test and Corporation acts and the concession of Catholic Emancipation. Four years previously, the latter would have been a precious boon, which would have tranquillized Ireland; in 1829, it was an extorted right, which formed the pretext for new and more dangerous agitation. Not to Sir Robert Peel, but to the prejudices of George IV., the obstinacy of the Duke of York, and the ministerial incapacity of Lord Liverpool, must the evils of

this delay be attributed. Emancipation was ungraciously conceded, and measures were adopted which seemed to indicate that recourse would be had to administrative artifices to render it a dead letter. It seemed as if the ministers were not prepared to accept the natural and necessary consequences of their own law. O'Connell was at once flushed with the pride of victory, and irritated by being excluded from all share in the conquest. He resolved to have either a party or a parliament of his own, and the personal exclusion levelled at him in the Emancipation bill, rendered him a formidable power, dangerous to the constitution, and inconsistent with the security of society.

To the Reform bill, Sir Robert Peel made a firm but melancholy resistance; he could hardly for a moment have doubted the certainty of its success, especially when the result of a dissolution had sent to the House of Commons a majority pledged to "the bill, the whole bill, and nothing but the bill;" that he was conscious of this, appears from his having yielded to Mr. Croker the leadership of the opposition, contenting himself with formal speeches, partaking more of the character of an innocent demonstration than of a regular battle. He frankly and honestly accepted reform so soon as it was established by law, and in, or out of power, never manifested any tendency towards adopting a policy of retrogression.

At one time the most unmeasured praise was bestowed on Sir Robert Peel for the wondrous patience, tact, and skill with which he developed the elements of strength in the Conservative party, and raised it from a miserable minority first to a rival equality, and finally to a triumphant majority. We have ever regarded his policy at this period as the greatest error of his life: he compromised principles which he believed; he winked at practices which he despised; and he forebore to protest against doctrines and conduct which he

thoroughly abhorred. The party of which he became the head was in truth "an organized hypocrisy;" it did not believe in the anti-Catholic and anti-Irish crusade which it patronized; it hated the infamous abuse of the Queen, which it tolerated; it proclaimed the creed of protection, to which it was nevertheless an infidel; it denounced in opposition every principle on which it was possible for itself to act when restored to power; it exasperated every national and religious feeling of the Irish, beyond all power of being soothed down by subsequent conciliation; and it roused every prejudice of Protestants and Englishmen, so as to render the adoption of a firm and uniform conciliatory policy all but impossible. Sir Robert Peel in opposition had provided all the materials for the destruction of his future ministry.

The whole course of his last administration was pre-eminently useful to the country, and as pre-eminently damaging to himself. His course involved at every step a greater amount of self-sacrifice than was ever before required from a statesman; and posterity will record to his honour, that never did a man make a more perfect abandonment of self. The profits of office he never cared for, even its patronage offered him but few attractions; his honourable ambition was to have his name associated with great, useful, and comprehensive measures. He had to advocate right principles in a wrong position, but the rectitude of the principles was his own, the falsehood of his position was mainly the result of circumstances; and while the empire has had all the benefit of the principles, he alone has suffered from the falsehood of the position.

The public life of a statesman involves the history of his country during the period of his career; it has been therefore impossible wholly to avoid comment on the persons introduced, and the facts recorded in these memoirs. It is hoped that this has been done with as little of the spirit of party

as can be expected from a writer contemporary with the events. A monetary crisis in England, repeated failures of the crops in Ireland, and the derangements produced by revolutions throughout Europe, have prevented the empire from deriving all those blessings from Free-trade, which were sanguinely predicted, and not unreasonably expected; but we unite with her Majesty in the trust which she expressed in closing the session of Parliament by which the great change was effected—"that by a combination of prudence with enterprise, and of a willing obedience to the law, with a desire for social progress, the inhabitants of this great empire will, through the Divine blessing, enjoy the full advantages of peace," and, in the words of our Liturgy, but slightly altered, that "peace and happiness, truth and justice, religion and liberty will be established amongst us throughout all generations."

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